Under the omnipresent thumb of the conniving warlord Yagyu Retsudo, the Shogun's secret Kurokuwa ninja warriors attempt to ensnare the embattled *ronin* Ogami Itto and his infant son, Daigoro. If the Lone Wolf can break these chains of death, there are many more waiting to challenge the masterful swordsman, including a vengeful widow, numerous police, and the freezing cold of winter itself. Read the story of Ogami's rise to the position of the Shogun's Officer of Death, and witness the seething root of Retsudo Yagyu's bitterness against Ogami...

"Koike and Kojima have become leading cultural figures in Japan because of (Lone Wolf and Cub); their work has influenced entire generations of creators."

— Shawn Machula

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LONE WOLF AND CUB

KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

LONE WOLF AND CUB

DARK HORSE COMICS

STUDIO PROTEUS

Front cover illustration by FRANK MILLER *and* LYNN VARLEY

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VOLUME 8

CHAINS OF DEATH

By KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

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CHAINS OF DEATH

子連れ狼

By KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

VOLUME

8

A NOTE TO READERS

Lone Wolf and Cub is famous for its carefully researched re-creation of Edo-Period Japan. To preserve the flavor of the work, we have chosen to retain many Edo-Period terms that have no direct equivalents in English. Japanese is written in a mix of Chinese ideograms and a syllabic writing system, resulting in numerous synonyms. In the glossary, you may encounter words with multiple meanings. These are words written with Chinese ideograms that are pronounced the same but carry different meanings. A Japanese reader seeing the different ideograms would know instantly which meaning it is, but these synonyms can cause confusion when Japanese is spelled out in our alphabet. *O-yurushi o* (please forgive us)!

LONE WOLF AND CUB

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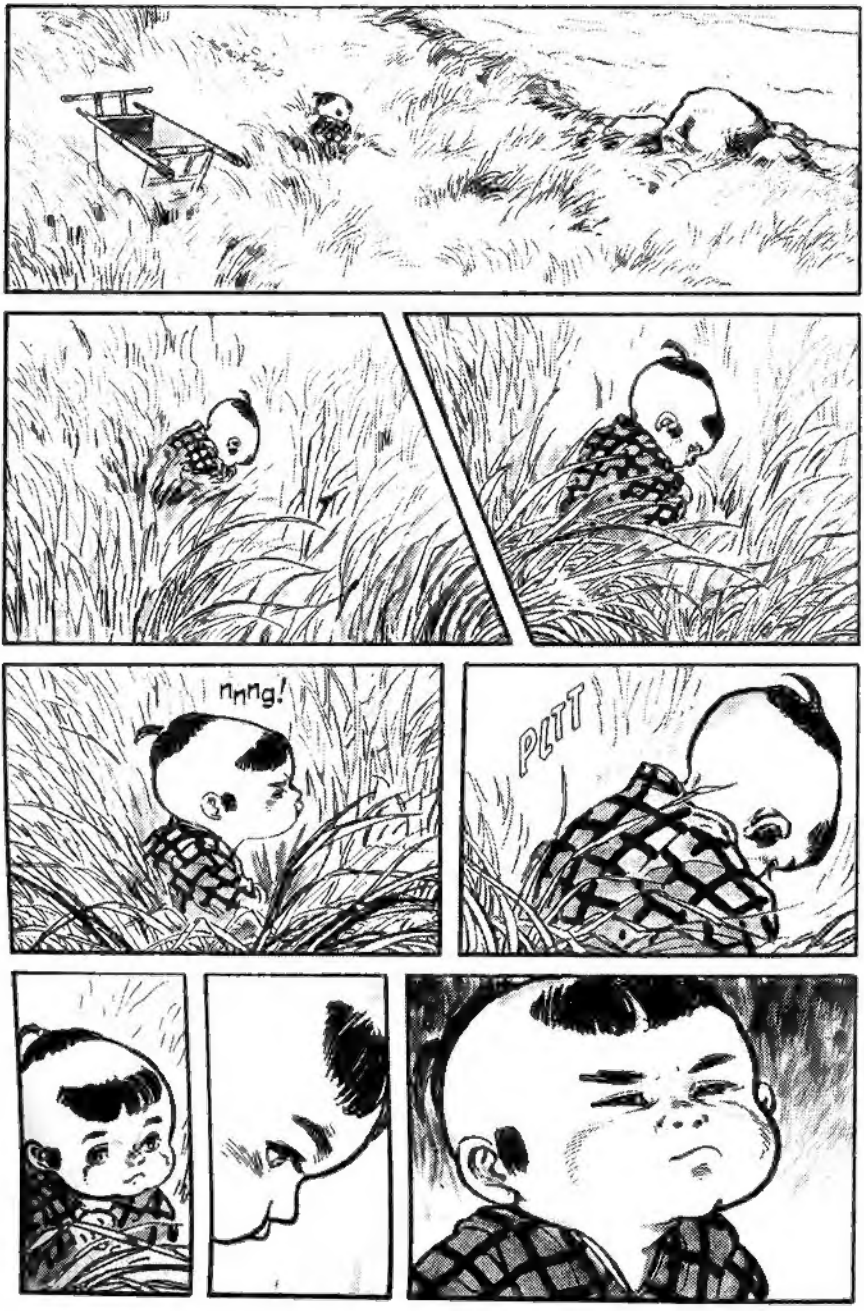
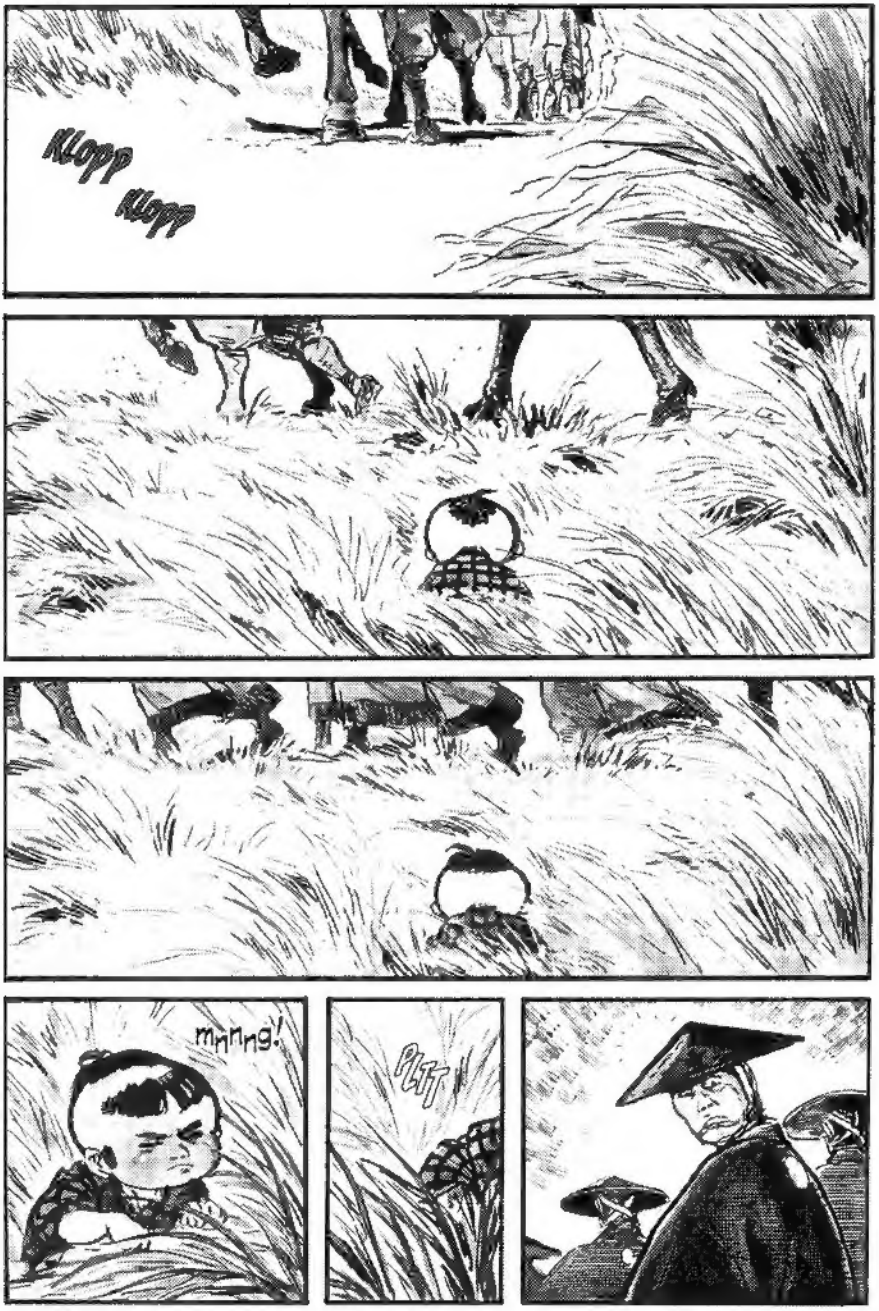
the thirty-ninth

Tidings of the Geese


nnng!
PLTT

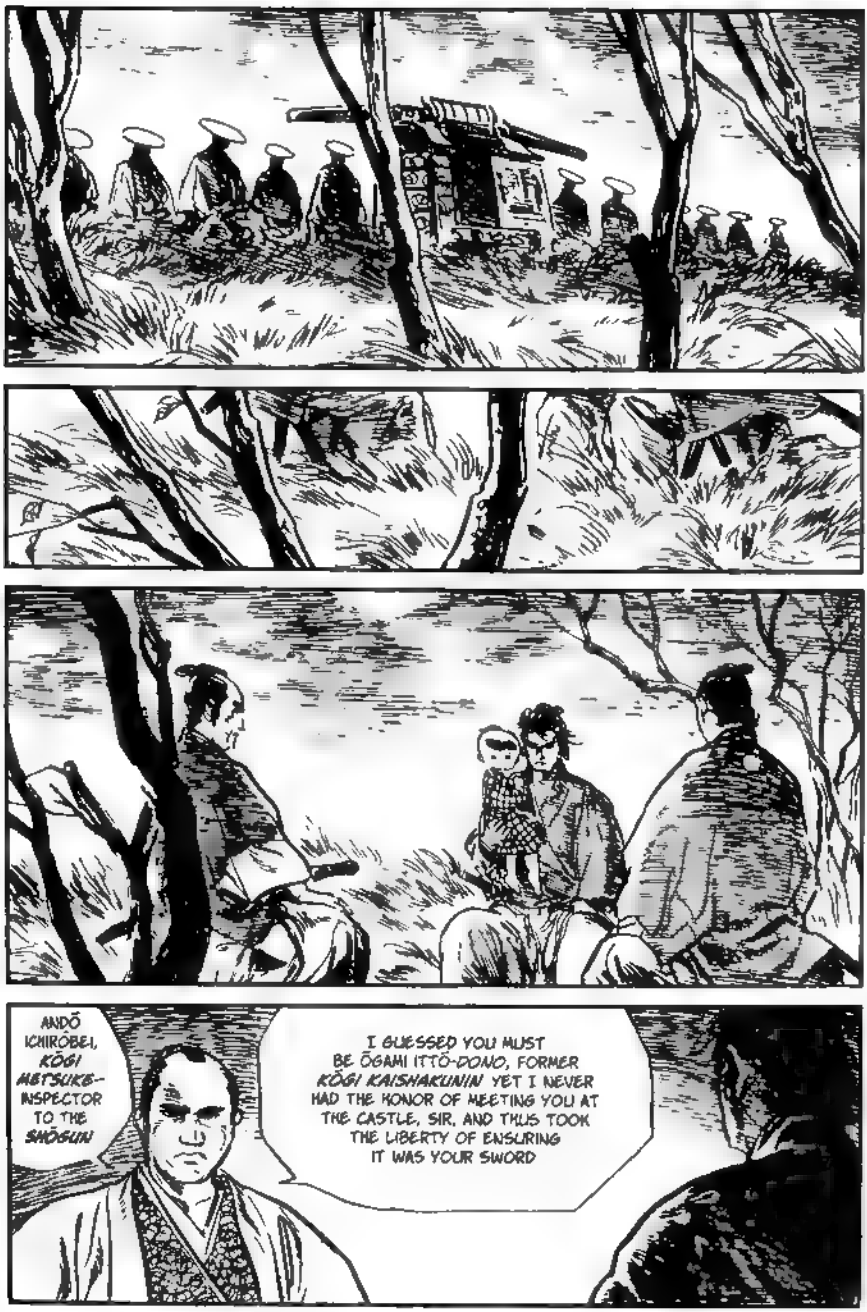
IBARI-MAEGOE ALONG THE MITO BYWAY.
ON THE ROAD FROM SENJŪ VIA FUNAGATA
AND GYŌTOKU, AND ON TO SAKURA.


KLOPP
KLOPP
mmng!
PLIFT

Y-YOU CUR!
IN FRONT OF OUR LORD'S PALANQUIN...?! WHAT INSOLENCE!
:PHHG!:
A BOY GOES POTTY IN THE FIELD... WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT?!
BUT, SIR! THE INSOLENCE OF IT! IF HE'S NOT ADMONISHED—

FOOL! WHAT DOES A CHILD KNOW OF INSOLENCE?!
MAN EATS, MAN SHITS! IF YOU ADMONISH PEOPLE FOR SUCH "INFRACTIONS," THERE'LL BE NO END TO IT!
SIR!
PAPA!

KANG
SHINGG
KTANG
I KNEW IT! DŌTANUKI!
PLEASE FORGIVE THIS INSULT.


ANDŌ ICHIRŌBEI, *KŌGI METSUKE*— INSPECTOR TO THE *SHŌGUN!*
I GUESSED YOU MUST BE ŌGAMI ITTŌ-*DONO*, FORMER *KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN* YET I NEVER HAD THE HONOR OF MEETING YOU AT THE CASTLE, SIR, AND THUS TOOK THE LIBERTY OF ENSURING IT WAS YOUR SWORD

FORGIVE MY OFFENSE.
WAKADO-SHIYORI, MAKINO ORIBE-NO-SHŌ.
INDEED, I AM ŌGAMI ITTŌ.
I AM AT YOUR SERVICE, LORD MAKINO.
THE LORD OF SHIMOUSA SAKURA HAN, HOTTA KOZUKENOSUKE MASANOBU, HAS BEEN DISBARRED AND SENTENCED TO EXILE!
WE JOURNEY TO DELIVER THAT ORDER, FIRST AND SECOND EMISSARIES OF OUR LORD THE SHŌGUN.
LORD HOTTA?!
. . . .
. . . .

THE HOTTA CLAN IS THE *ROCK* OF THE TOKUGAWA *FUDAI*
AND MASANOBU HIMSELF IS A TRUE SAMURAI, *UPRIGHT* AND *RESOLUTE*. YOU HAVE EVERY REASON TO BE SURPRISED
HOTTA-*SAMA* HAS LONG BEEN DISMAYED BY THE GOVERNANCE OF THE *RŌJŪ*. THIS TWENTY-EIGHTH OF SEPTEMBER, IT CAME TO A HEAD. HE SUDDENLY RETURNED TO SAKURA FROM EDO, AND WITHDREW TO HIS CASTLE. HE THEN SENT A *KANSHO* TO THE SHŌGUNATE.
A MOST *STINGING* DOCUMENT.
JIKI-KANSHO: DIRECT PETITION TO THE SHŌGUN

With trepidation I address these words to my lord...
During the ten years of my lord's most honored reign, every year has brought new scandal, while there have been no tidings to gladden the hearts of the people. Reviewing the state of the nation, I find the citizenry impoverished, the very horses and oxen worked to exhaustion. The source of this malaise is the corruption of the Toshiyori, your most senior officials.

The Toshiyori govern for themselves alone, and thus the people are driven to despair. Of my own volition, I offer my lord the thirty thousand koku over which I rule, that you may employ it in the cause of enlightened government.

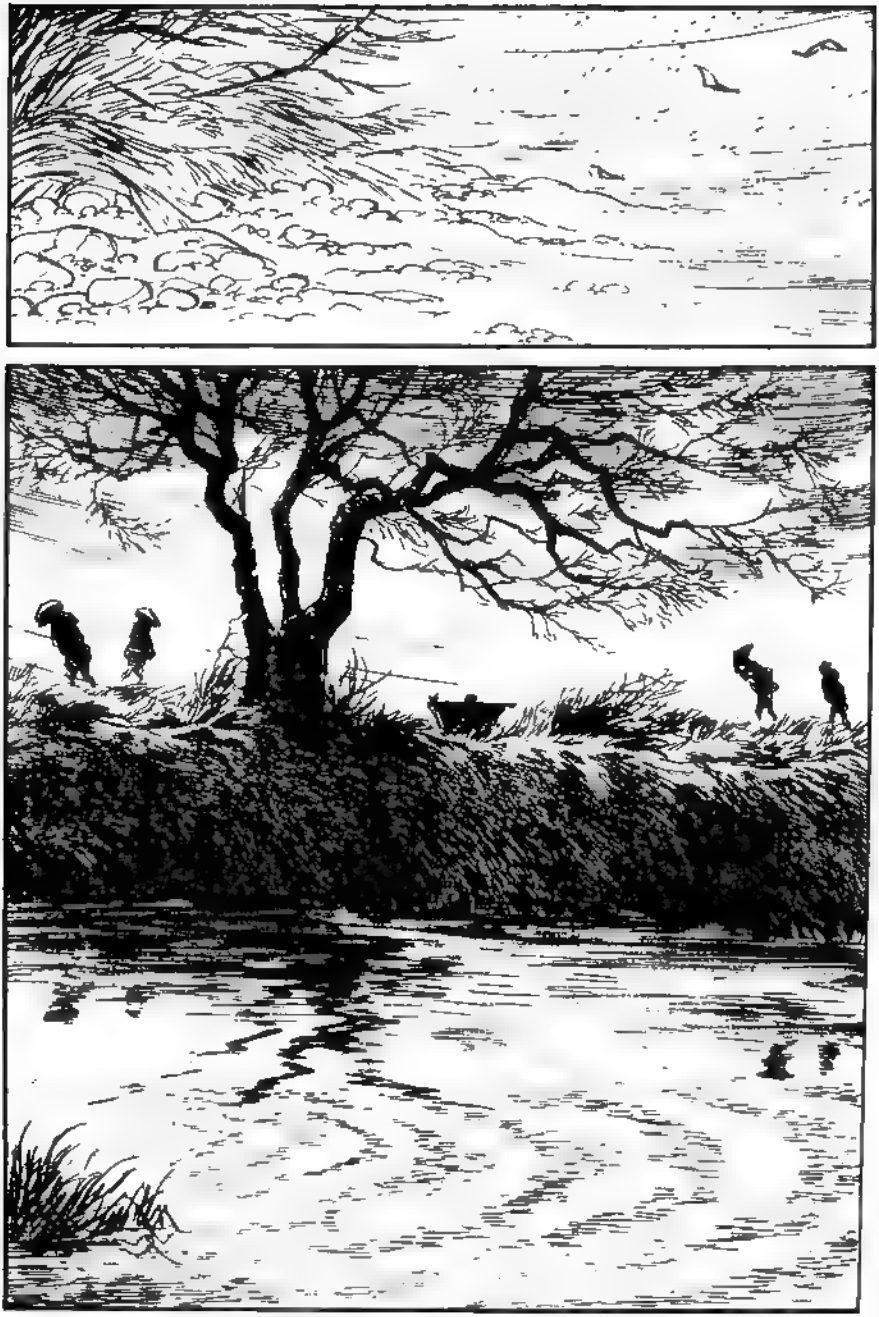
REVOLTED BY THE CEASELESS POLITICS OF GREED, LORD HOTTA HAS BEQUEATHED THE THIRTY THOUSAND KOKU OF HIS OWN SHIMOUSA SAKURA HAN TO THE SHŌGUN.
HE ASKS FOR IT TO BE USED FOR THE GOOD OF THE NATION.
. . . .
. . . .
THE TRUE SAMURAI CAN NO LONGER SERVE HIS MASTER.
WE ARE FALLEN ON EVIL TIMES.

YOURSELF, ŌGAMI-DONO. AND NOW LORD HOTTA.
THERE ARE FEW SAMURAI OF HONOR LEFT TO SERVE THE TOKUGAWA.
TOKK
WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE ME DO.?
!! ....
THE SHŌGUNATE HAS DECREED DISBARMENT AND EXILE, BUT THAT IS NOT ENOUGH TO APPEASE THE RŌJŪ AND LORD HOTTA HIMSELF WILL CONTINUE TO CHALLENGE THEM, SENDING MORE KANSHO AS LONG AS HE STILL LIVES.
THE YAGYŪ ASSASSINS KNOW THE WILL OF THE RŌJŪ THEY WILL INFILTRATE SAKURA HARD ON OUR HEELS, AND MURDER LORD HOTTA!

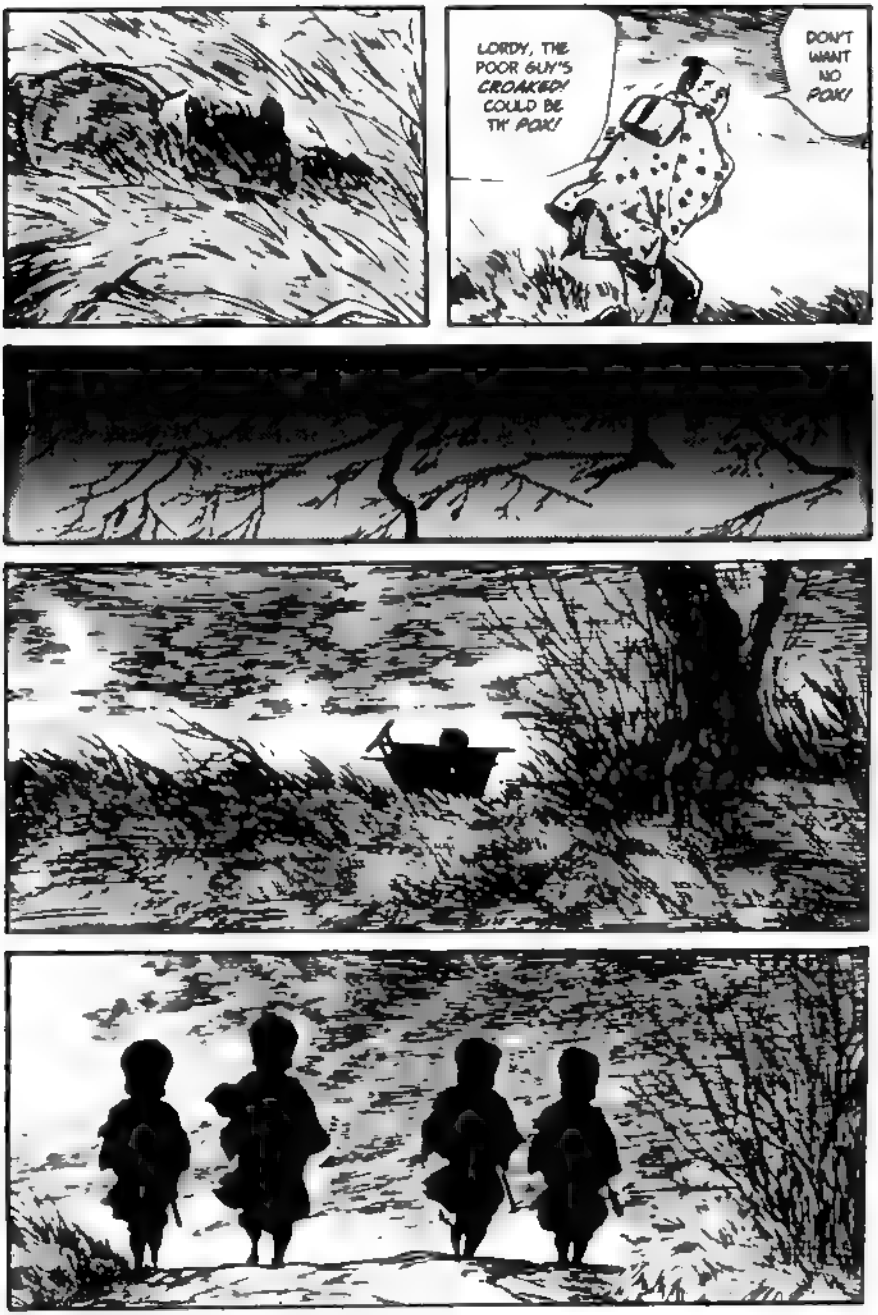
IT CAN ONLY BE DIVINE PROVIDENCE THAT LED US TO YOU, THE ASSASSIN *LONE WOLF AND CUB*, WHO DWELLS IN *MEIFUMADŌ* TO DEFEAT THE YAGYŪ. IT RECALLS THE TALE OF *GANSHO*, THE TIDINGS OF THE GEESE.
THERE ARE THINGS A RETAINER OF THE TOKUGAWA MAY NOT SAY ALOUD. YET I REMEMBER THE WISE MASTER *SOBU* OF CHINA'S ANCIENT HAN DYNASTY, WHO, WHEN TAKEN PRISONER BY BRIGANDS, TIED A MESSAGE TO THE LEG OF A WILD GOOSE TO WARN HIS PEOPLE.
SO I AM TO READ YOUR *GANSHO*, AND STRIKE DOWN LORD HOTTA'S ASSAILANTS?
IS *THAT* WHAT YOU ASK?
NOT ASK, *BEG!*
LORD HOTTA IS THE CORNERSTONE OF THE TOKUGAWA! IF TRUE SAMURAI ONCE AGAIN LEAD THE NATION, HE WILL BE OUR *LION*
WE CAN'T LET THESE *YAGYŪ* SCUM DESTROY SUCH A MAN. YES, WE SEEK YOUR AID

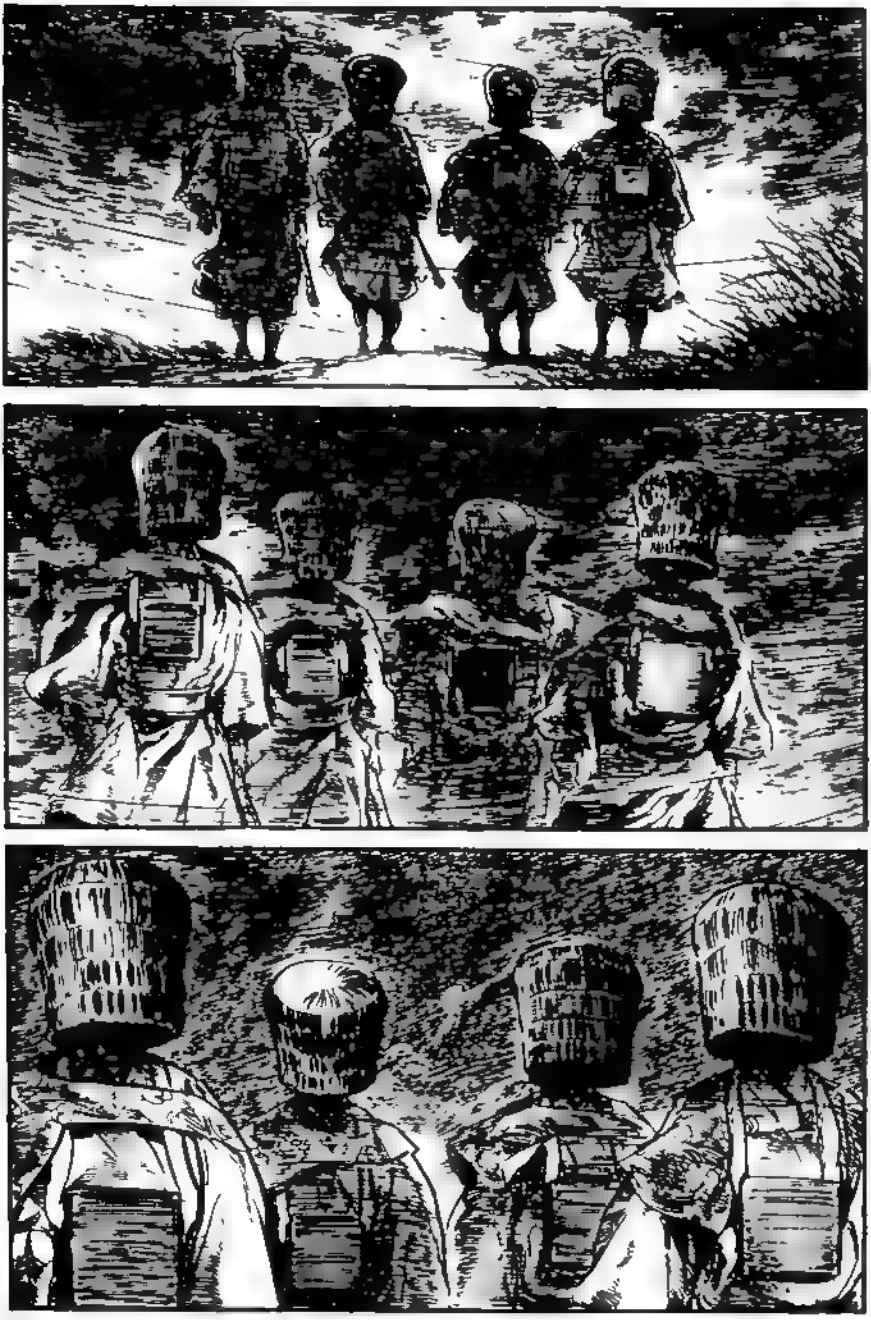
I HEAR THE TIDINGS OF THE GEESE.
YOU MAY TELL LORD HOTTA SO!

UNLIKE THESE GEESE, THE YAGYŪ WILL MOVE UNDER-COVER.



??
WHAT'S A TYKE LIKE YOU DOIN' WAY OUT HERE, ALL ALONE?
WHERE'S YER MA? YER PA?


LORDY, THE POOR GUY'S CROAKED! COULD BE TH' POX!
DON'T WANT NO POX!



CAN IT BE..?
HMM. THAT CART.. A THREE-YEAR-OLD BOY.
IT COULD BE..

MORAN!
IT IS! OGAMI ITTŌ...!
DEAD BY THE ROADSIDE ...?
MAKE CERTAIN!

KRSH
NNGAH!
SHCHOK
HRNGK!

NO!
DAMN!!

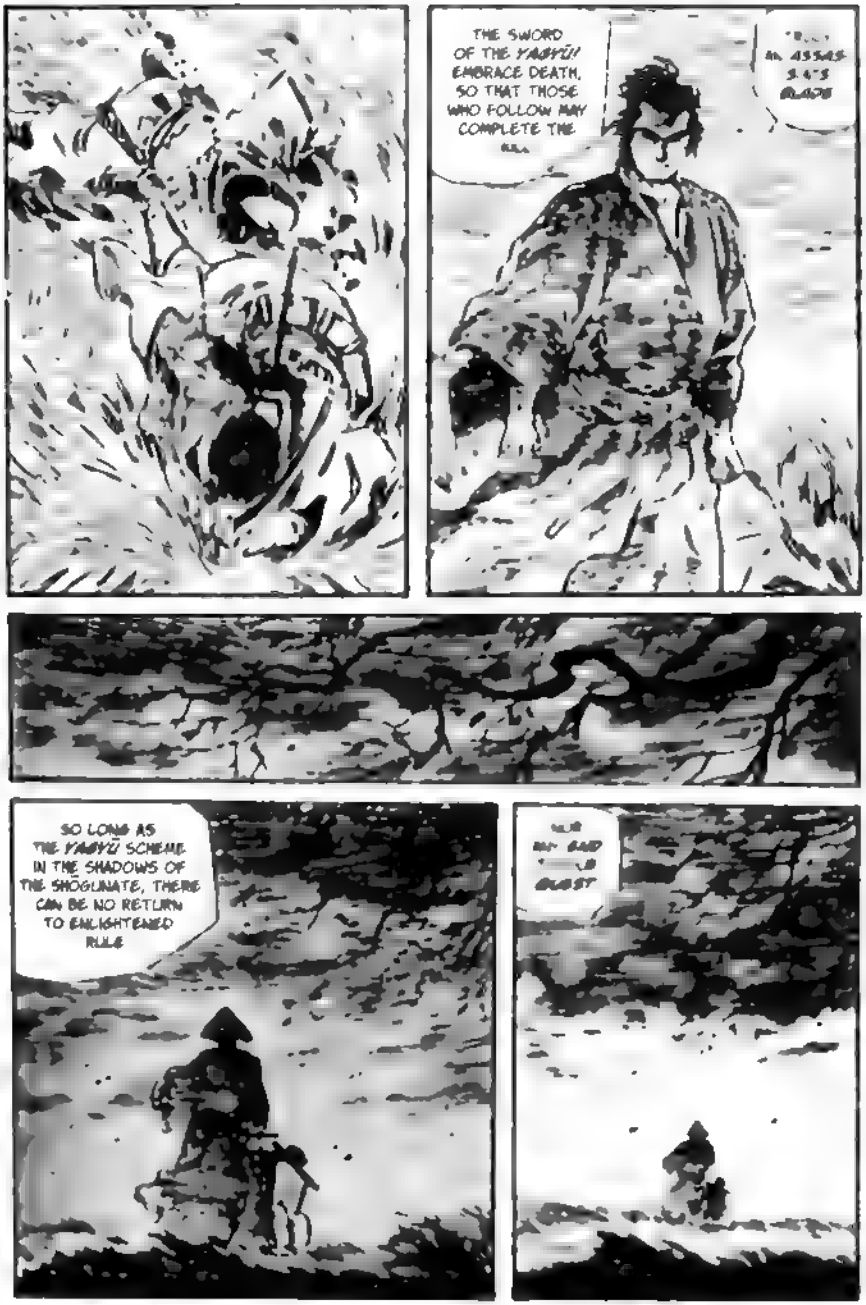
NNGG

RRNG!
C-COWARD!!

INSOLENCE INDEED! THE VERY ESSENCE OF THE SWORD-WILL OF THE YAGYU IS COWARDICE! THE MANY AGAINST THE FEW!
WHY ARE YOU HERE?!
WAITING FOR YOU— WARNED BY THE BAKUFU OF HOTTA KOZUKENOSUKE.
N. NON-SENSE!
IMPOSSIBLE!
HOTTA DOESN'T KNOW WE'RE COMING! NOW...
THE TIDINGS OF THE GEESE.
HRM!

SO BE IT, ITTŌ!
THEN FACE THE ASSASSIN BLADES OF THE YAGYŪ!

SLCCH


THE SWORD OF THE YAGYŪ! EMBRACE DEATH, SO THAT THOSE WHO FOLLOW MAY COMPLETE THE
SO LONG AS THE YAGYŪ SCHEME IN THE SHADOWS OF THE SHOGUNATE, THERE CAN BE NO RETURN TO ENLIGHTENED RULE

the fortieth

The Frozen Crane

OH, OH GOD...!
MADAM! WHAT AILS YOU?!
IT'S... MY OLD... ILLNESS. OOH!
YOU CAN'T JUST LIE HERE!
THE CHILL WILL ONLY MAKE IT WORSE!
HERE. YOU CAN TAKE SHELTER IN THAT OLD MILL.
JUST A LITTLE FARTHER.
OOH! AHNG!

AAAHHHN!!
SH

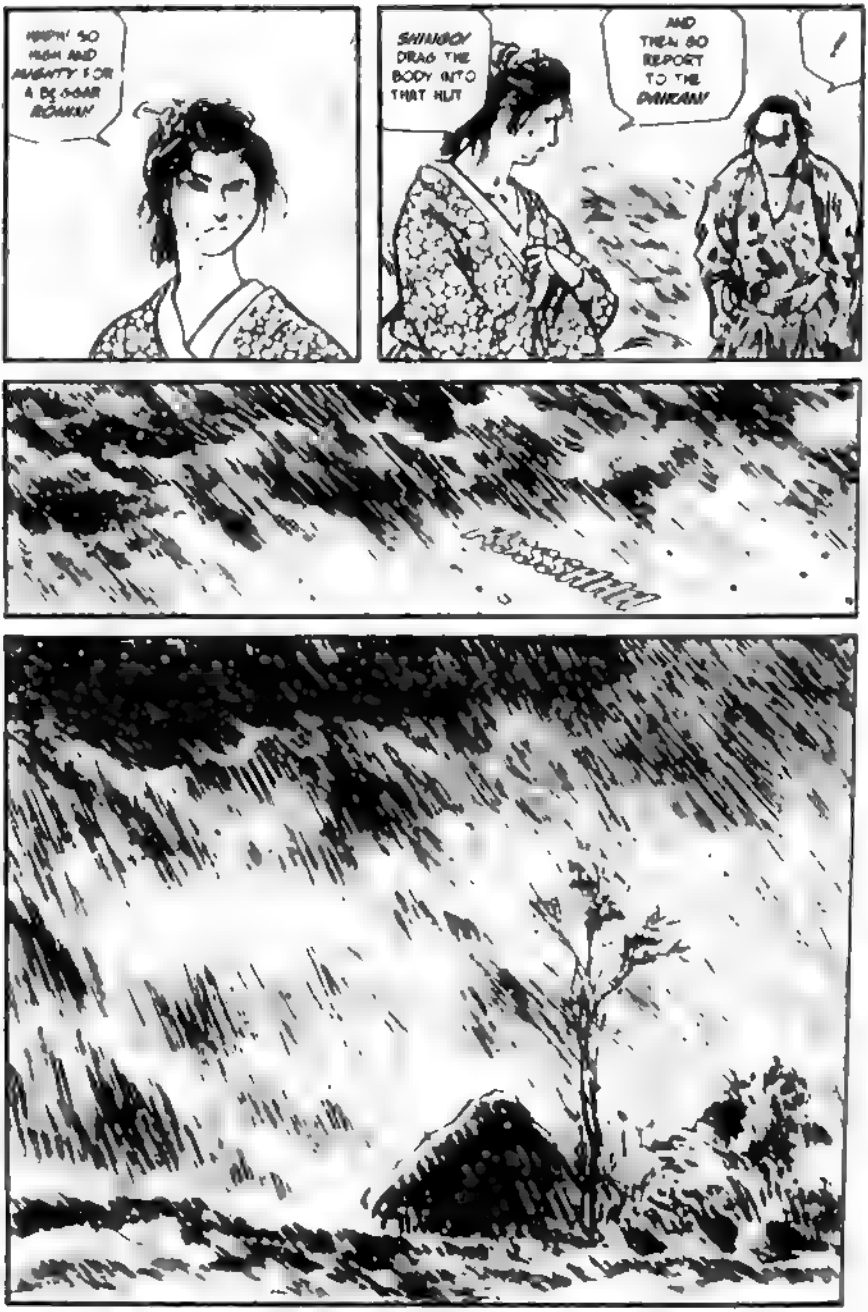
DIE!!
THOM

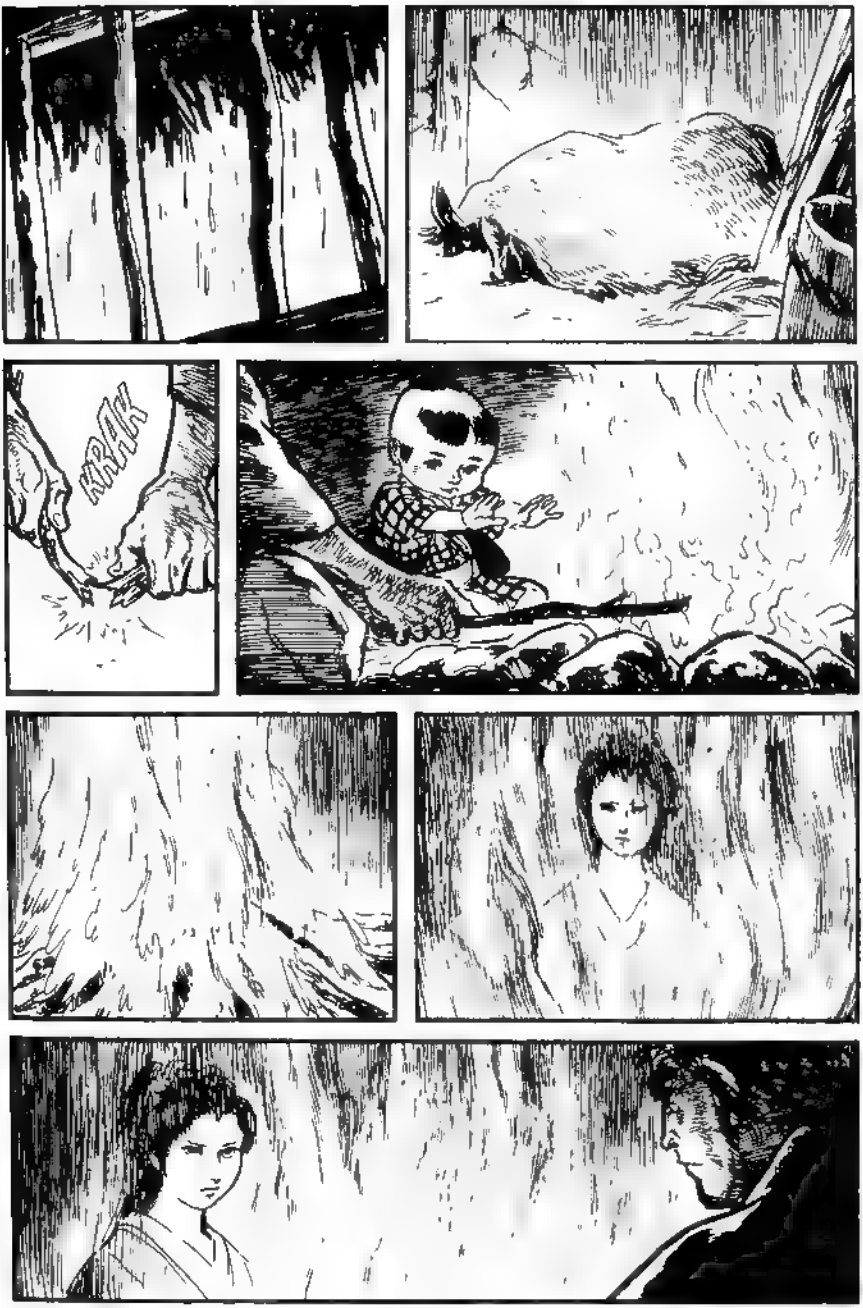
SIR, I ASK A FAVOR!
HE SERVED LORD KATŌ SHIDO-NO-KAMI ON HAMAJUKU MAN
AND THAT
HIS SUPERIOR SHIMACHIKARŌ WAS DUETING KEAKYAKU! I AM TSURU WIFE OF WATARI YŪNOSHIN, FOULLY MURDERED BY HIS HAND
THIS IS BUNJIRO MY HUSBAND'S YOUNGER BROTHER
AFTER YEARS OF STRUGGLE AND SUFFERING TOGETHER WE HAVE FINALLY ACHIEVED OUR QUEST!

YOU PASS BY HERE WHEN YOU DID
OF COURSE, BUT THEY'LL SEND A CORO TO INSPECT THE BODY, SIR THAT'S WHEN WE WILL NEED YOUR TESTIMONY

THE AUTHORITIES CAN REFUSE TO
...THIS SAYS YOU DID YOU WATCHED US CHALLENGE HIM, AND

FOR SOMEONE WANDERING IN POVERTY, SIR, I SHOULD THINK *MONEY* MORE USEFUL THAN *FACE!*
. . . .
TH-THEN. THEN AT LEAST SAY YOU *DIDN'T* SEE WHAT HAPPENED HERE! NO *UNNECESSARY* WORDS!
AS I SAID BEFORE—I SAW *NOTHING*


WHEW! SO HIGH AND MIGHTY FOR A DE-GAIJIN RONIN!
SHIMIZU! DRAG THE BODY INTO THAT HUT
AND THEN GO REPORT TO THE DAIMYO!
!


KRAK

SINCE IT HAS BEEN MORE THAN TWO *YEARS* SINCE WE LEFT OUR *HAN*, WE HAVE MONEY DELIVERED BY *HIKYAKU*
WE CAN GET YOU ALL YOU NEED.
PERHAPS A *HUNDRED RYŌ*?
KRAK
A YEAR AND A HALF TO FIND HIS TRAIL...SIX MONTHS AND MORE IN PURSUIT AND A SINGLE WORD FROM YOU *COULD* RUIN IT ALL.
THE CORONER SHOULD BE HERE SHORTLY

IF YOU ARE HERE WITH ME, THEY'LL BE SUSPICIOUS.
AND IF THEY ASK YOU TO EXPLAIN...
KRAK
ONE QUESTION. DID YOU CHOOSE THE PATH OF DEMONS AND SLAUGHTER TO AVENGE YOUR HUSBAND—
—OR DID YOU CHOOSE IT TO REBUILD AND INCREASE YOUR HOUSEHOLD, AND WIN FAME FOR YOUR VIRTUE?
WHY...WHY, OF COURSE TO.. TO FIND HIS KILLER, TO PLACE HIS SOUL AT REST.
THEN IGNORE THE EYES AND WORDS OF STRANGERS, AND FEAR NOT THE JUDGMENT OF THE DAIKAN.

KRAK
A TRUE QUEST FOR REVENGE IS NOT UNDERTAKEN FOR PROFIT OR FAME.
ALL THAT MATTERS IS TO SILENCE THE CRY OF YOUR HEART! ON THE PATH OF VENGEANCE...
THE MEANS DO NOT MATTER! ONLY THE END!
.....
KSSSHH

:hff!:
:hahh!:
SWIPE
:hahh!:
:huff!:
WH, WHAT'S WRONG ?!
S-SISTER-IN-LAW! OUR OUR LORDY
:hahh!:
OUR LORDY
:hff!:

BY CHANCE, LORD SADO-NO-KAMI WAS STAYING AT THE HONJIN IN ARAI-JUKU, ON HIS WAY BACK FROM EDO! AND, AND . .
SOMETHING HAPPENED TO OUR LORD?!
.IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT SOME-ONE BROKE INTO HIS CHAMBERS... AND HE WAS MURDERED!
N-NO... THIS CAN'T BE!
THE DAIKAN'S OFFICE WAS ABSOLUTE BEDLAM! I QUICKLY MADE OUR REPORT, RAN TO THE HONJIN TO SEE OUR PEOPLE, AND THEY . THEY .
. THEY WOULDN'T EVEN TAKE ONE SECOND TO SPEAK TO ME!
THEY THEY PRACTICALLY THREW ME OUT!
TH-THEN.

IDENTIFY YOURSELVES!

WE'VE JUST AVENGED MY HUSBAND, SIR! WE REPORTED
AH, THAT'S RIGHT—I HEARD

HERE—OUR ADAUCHI SHAMENJŌ.
IF YOU PLEASE

HMM. . . . .

AND THIS IS SUZUKI GUNSHICHIRŌ?

Y-YES, SIR
A BITTER IRONY, INDEED. YOU FINALLY DISPATCH YOUR ENEMY, ONLY FOR YOUR LORD TO MEET THIS DREADFUL END

REST ASSURED THAT WE ARE SEARCHING EVERY—
BY WHO IS THIS?!
DID HE ASSIST IN YOUR ADAUCHI?
NO, SIR. HE HE WAS JUST PASSING BY
WHAT?!
YOU! THERE! YOUR NAME AND MAN!
WHERE ARE YOU—
LONE WOLF AND CUB!
ASSASSIN!..

L-LONE WOLF ..?!
AND IT WAS I WHO ASSASSINATED SADO-NO-KAMI!
WHAT ?!
V- VILLAIN!
DROP YOUR SWORD!
AH?! KILL HIM!
HYAAAA!

FWHIT
SCHOKK

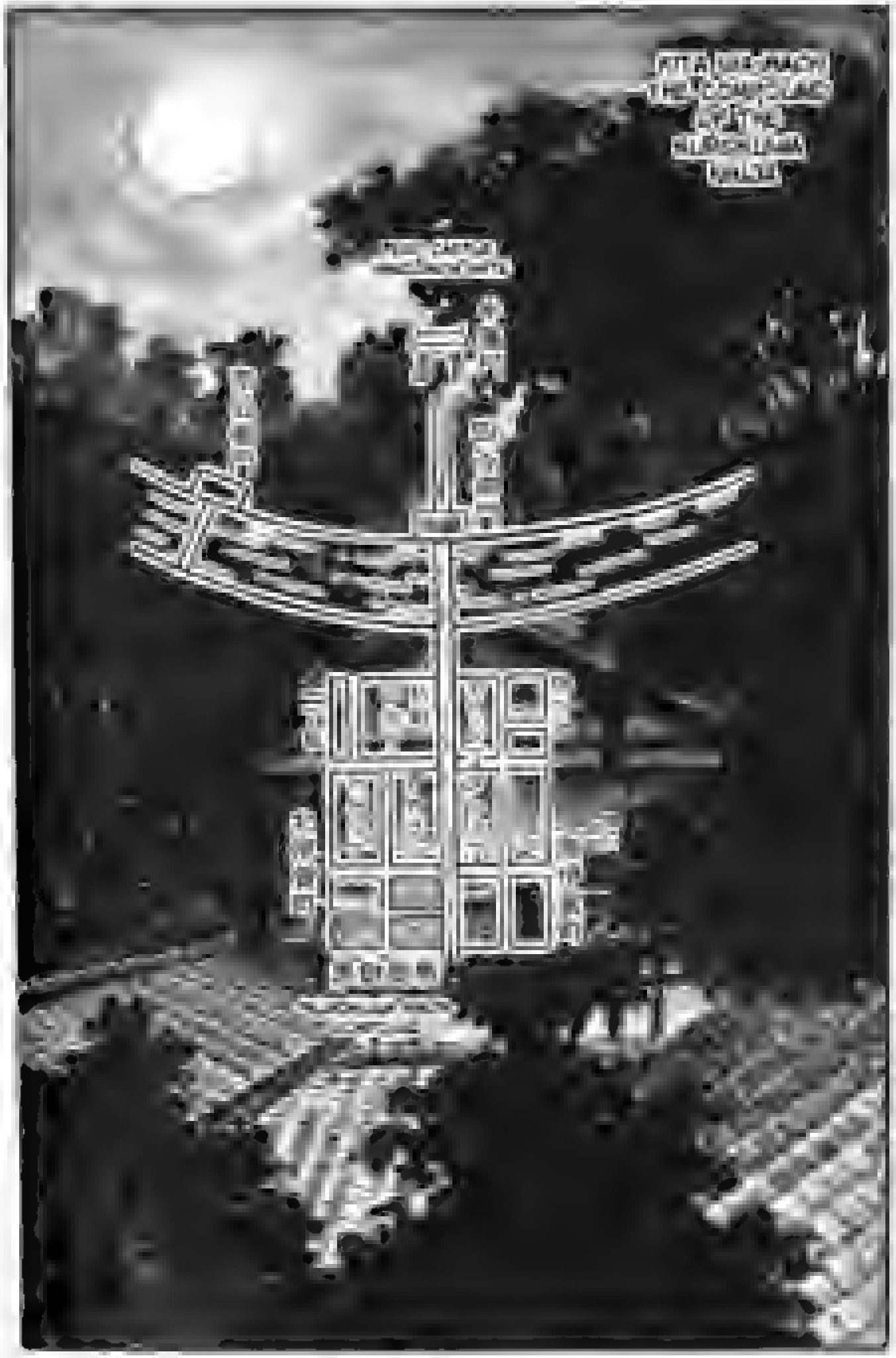
CHOK
SHKK
CHOK

COME OUT! FACE ME!
DON'T YOU WANT TO AVENGE YOUR LORD ?!
THAT WOULD BRING YOU FAME! THE VIRTUOUS WIFE!

BEHOLD YOUR NAMESAKE! TSURU THE CRANE! IN THE HEART OF WINTER SHE FOLDS ONE LEG AND BURIES HER HEAD BENEATH A WING, MOVING NOT A MUSCLE. .
THAT'S WHAT IT MEANS TO SURVIVE ON COURAGE ALONE!
ITEZURU— THE FROZEN CRANE! THAT DESPERATE STRUGGLE IS HER BEAUTY!
SHE DOESN'T RESIST. SHE DOESN'T COMPLAIN. SHE DEPENDS ONLY ON HERSELF, DRAWING OUT HER LAST OUNCE OF STRENGTH.
IS THAT NOT THE WAY OF ALL WHO TRULY FOLLOW THEIR HEARTS. ?

the forty-first

Chains of Death



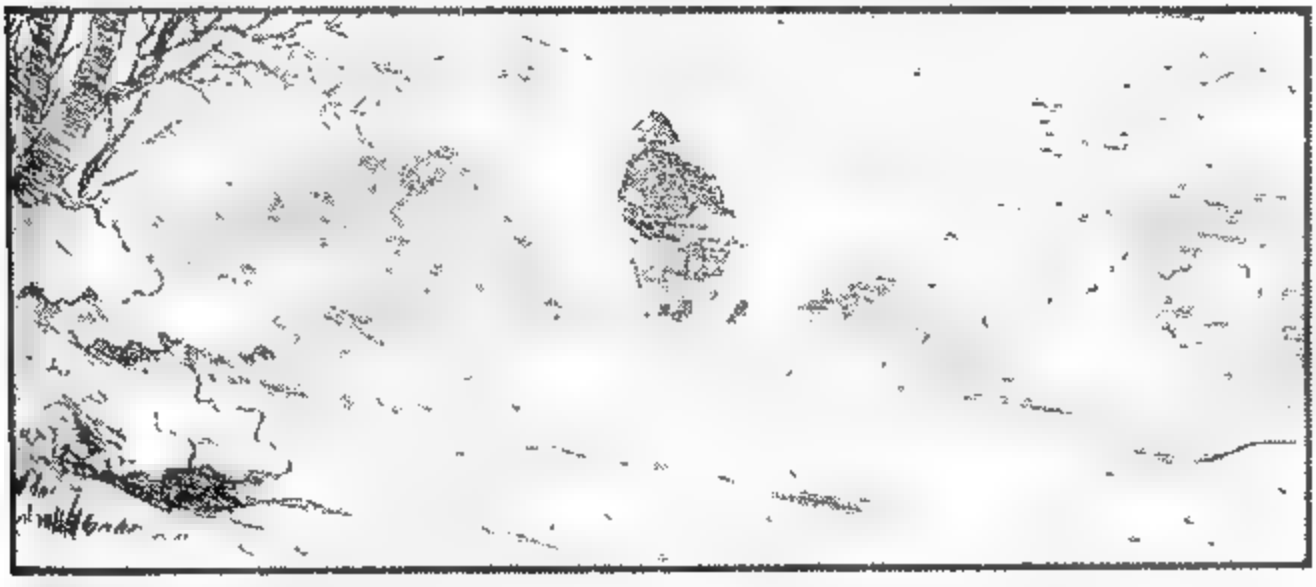
SHOW HIM THE WAY!

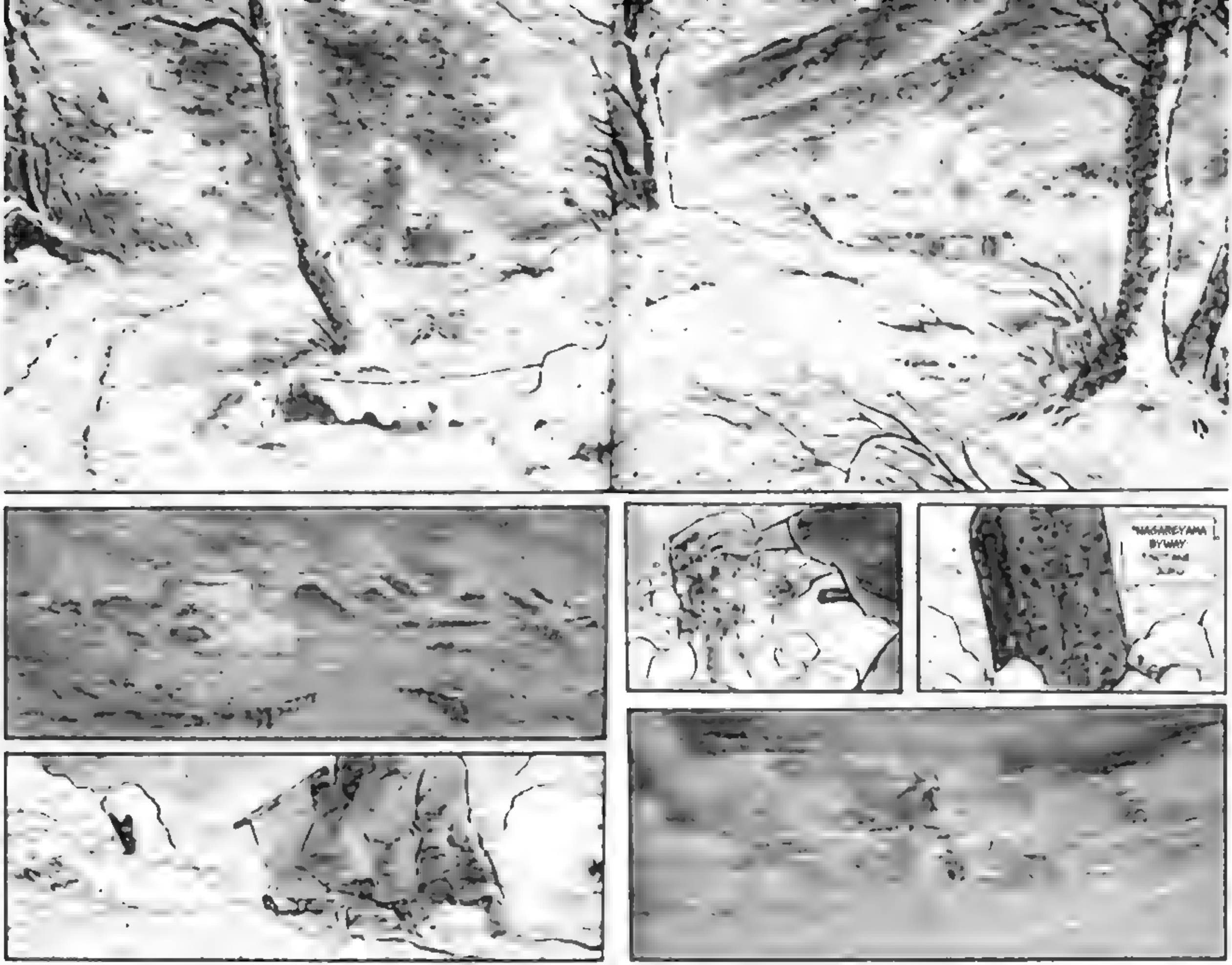
THE WARRIOR WHO CHOOSE
NOT THE WAY OF FEALTY

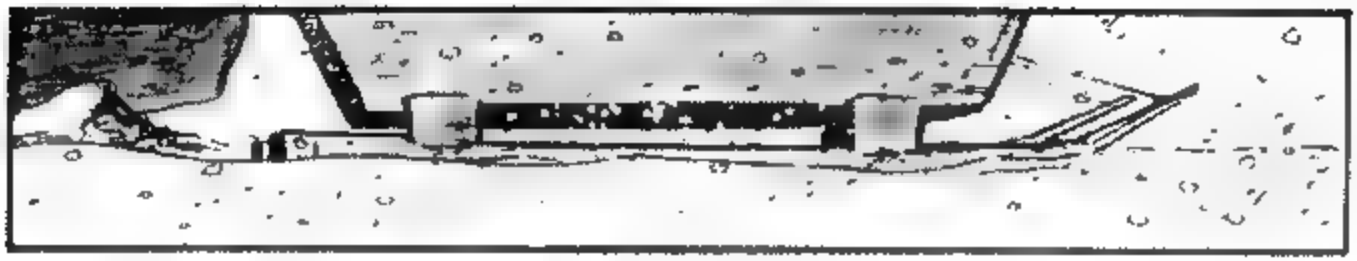
PTION BRINGS HIM PAIN

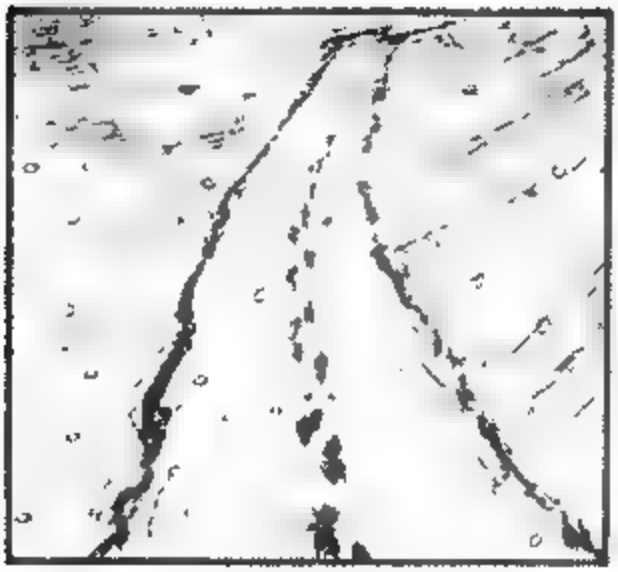
THE SHINOBI TURNS...

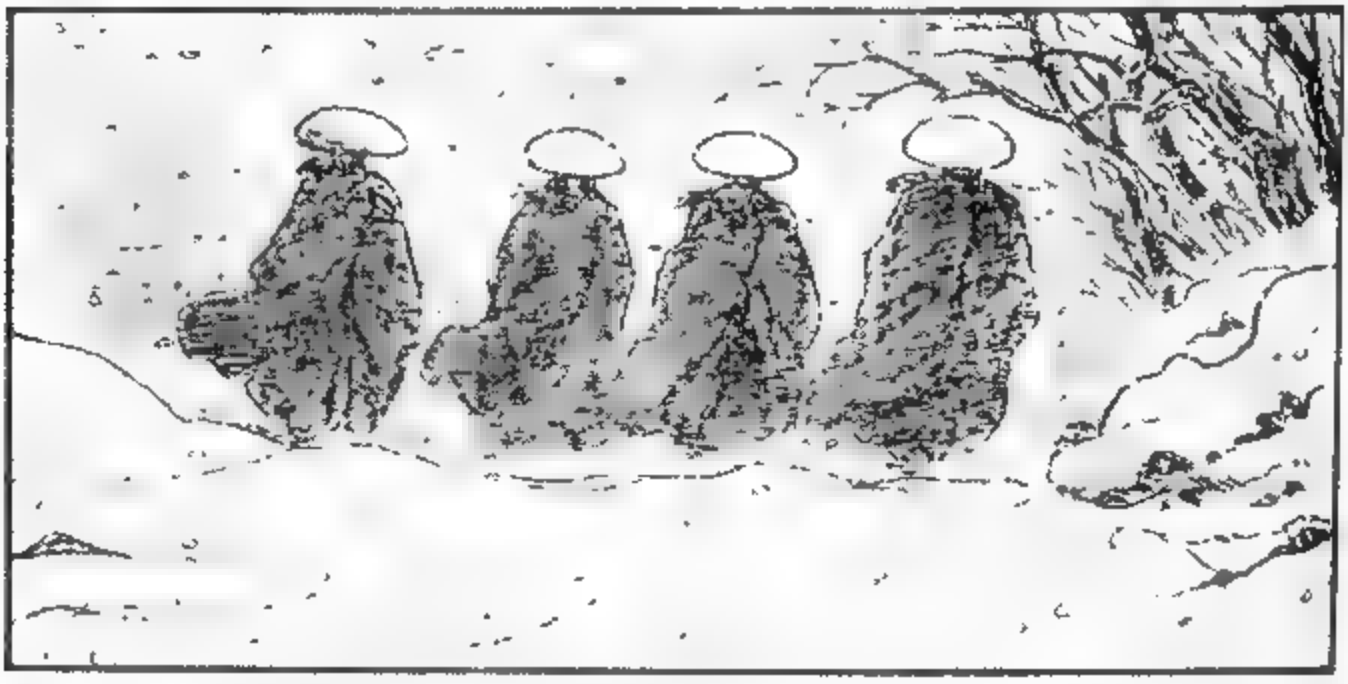
BY PLEDGE AND PROMISE, THE YAGYŪ CANNOT RAISE SWORDS AGAINST ŌGAMI ITT-
YOUR LEADER OZUNU
SWORD. YOU CAN NO LONGER STAND BY!
KILL THAT MAN AND HIS CHILD! NOW! WITH THE KUROKUWA SHIBARITARU!

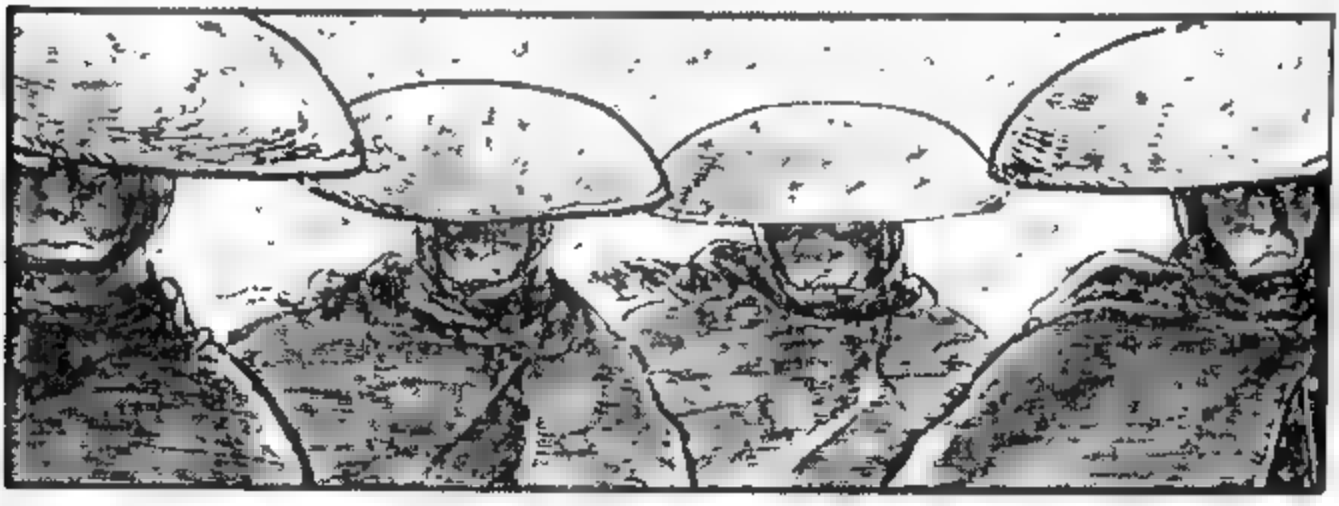


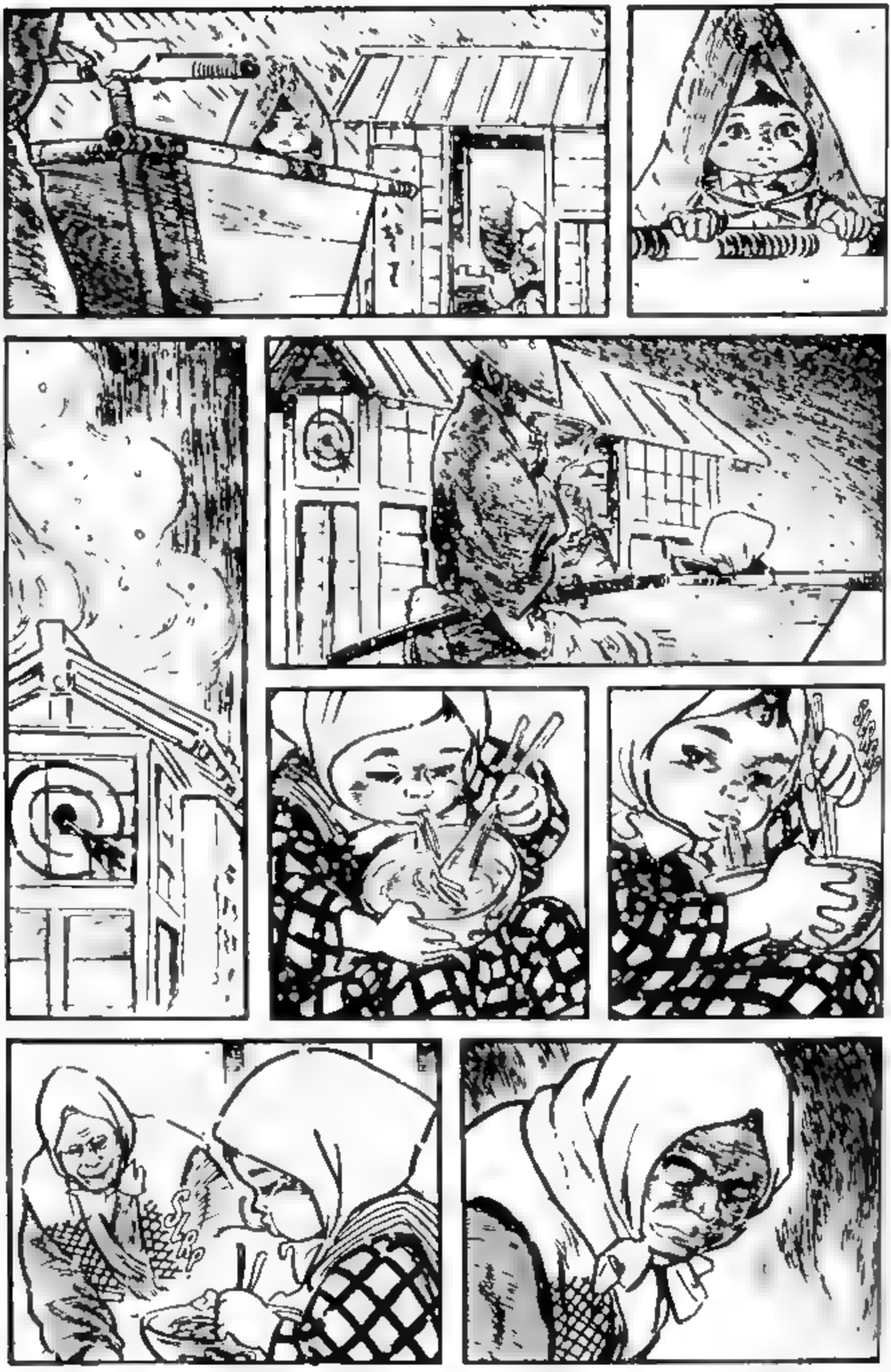

NAGAREYAMA
BYWAY



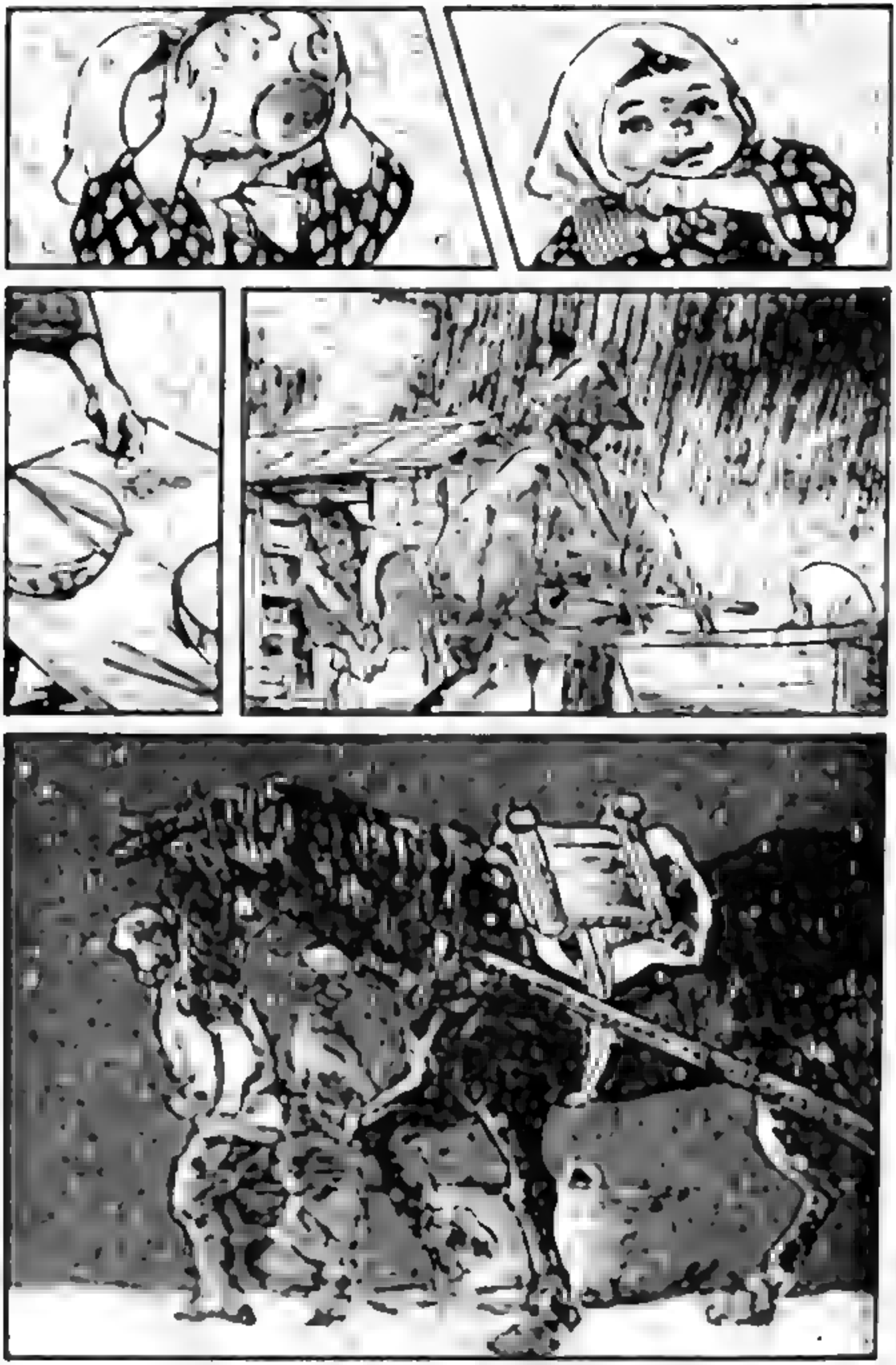







Slup

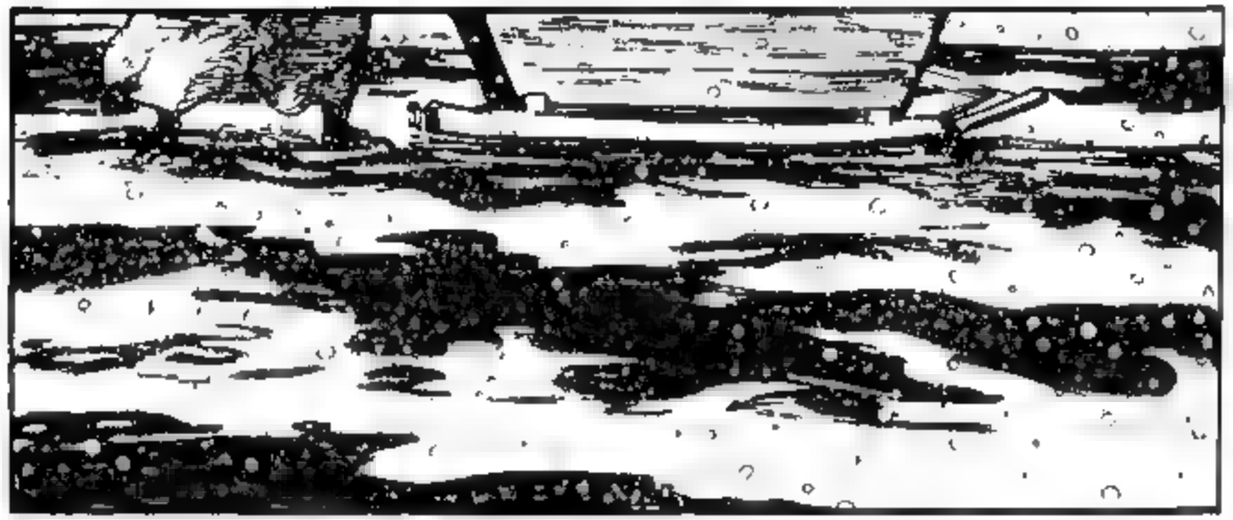
OIL, FIRE AND SNOW. . . . .
THE SNOW WILL WORK LIKE WATER, AND DOUBLE THE EFFECT OF THE FLAMES.
THE FIRST STAGE OF *SHIBARITARU* IS ATTACK BY OIL. . NOT EVEN *ITTŌ* CAN ESCAPE THIS TRAP



BUUEEE
SKRASH!

KA
SPLOSSH

WHMP
BLOOSH
SISSHH
SPRKK

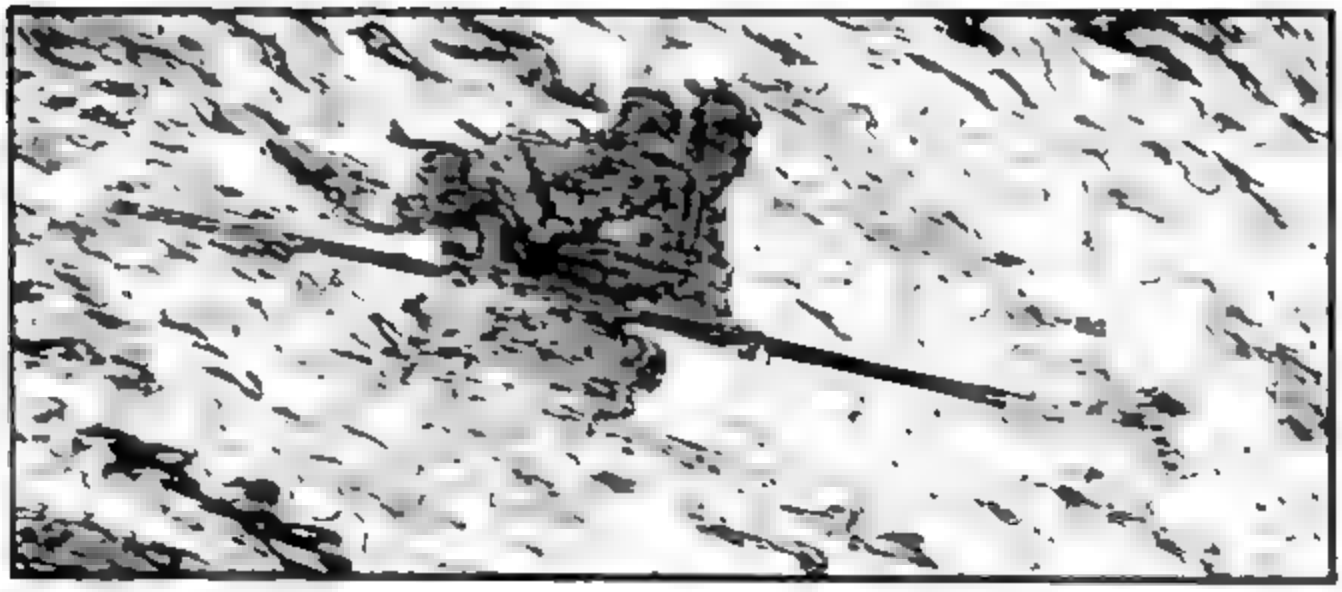


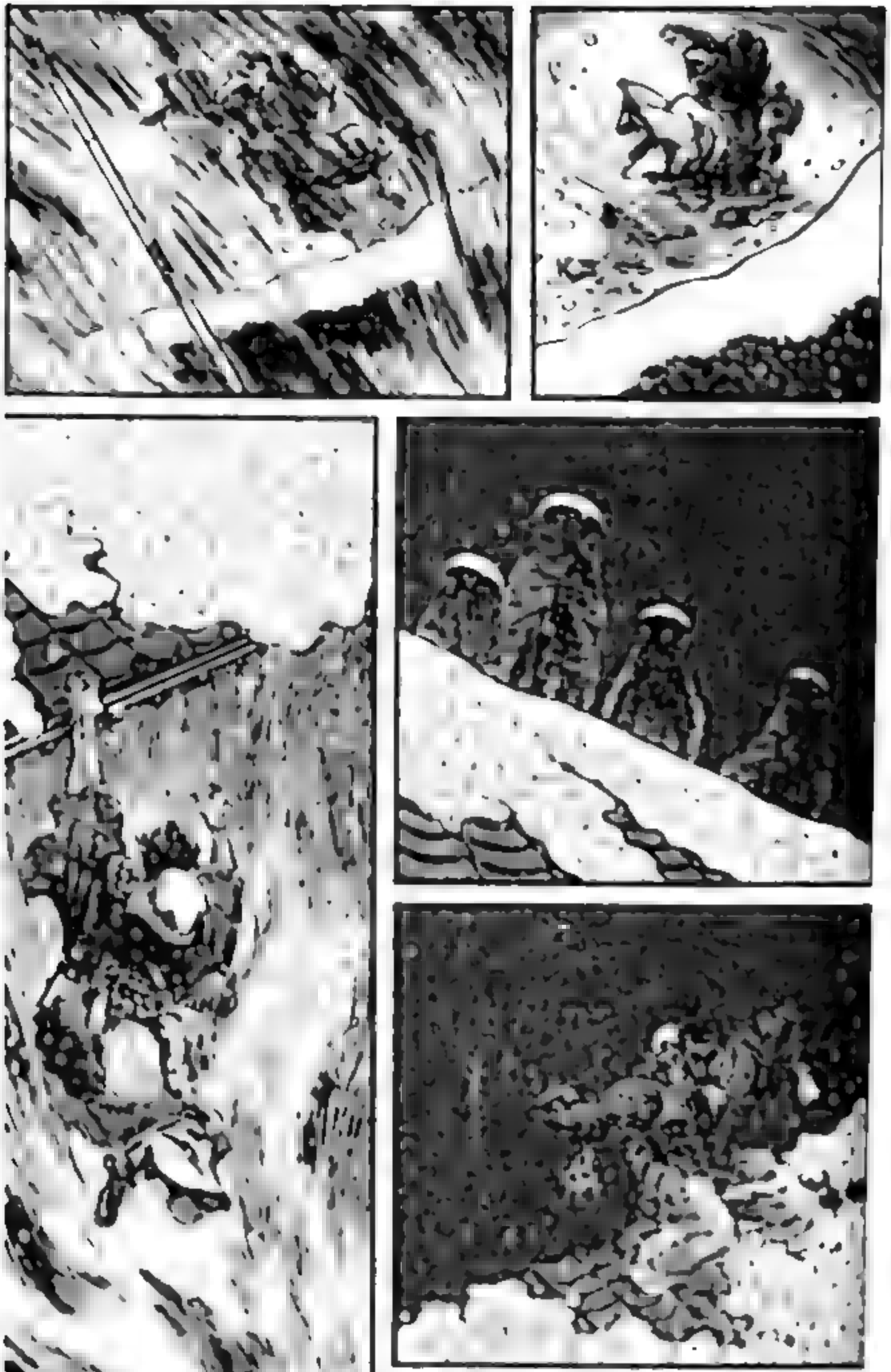
FWHOOSH
KRAKKLE

WHKOOM

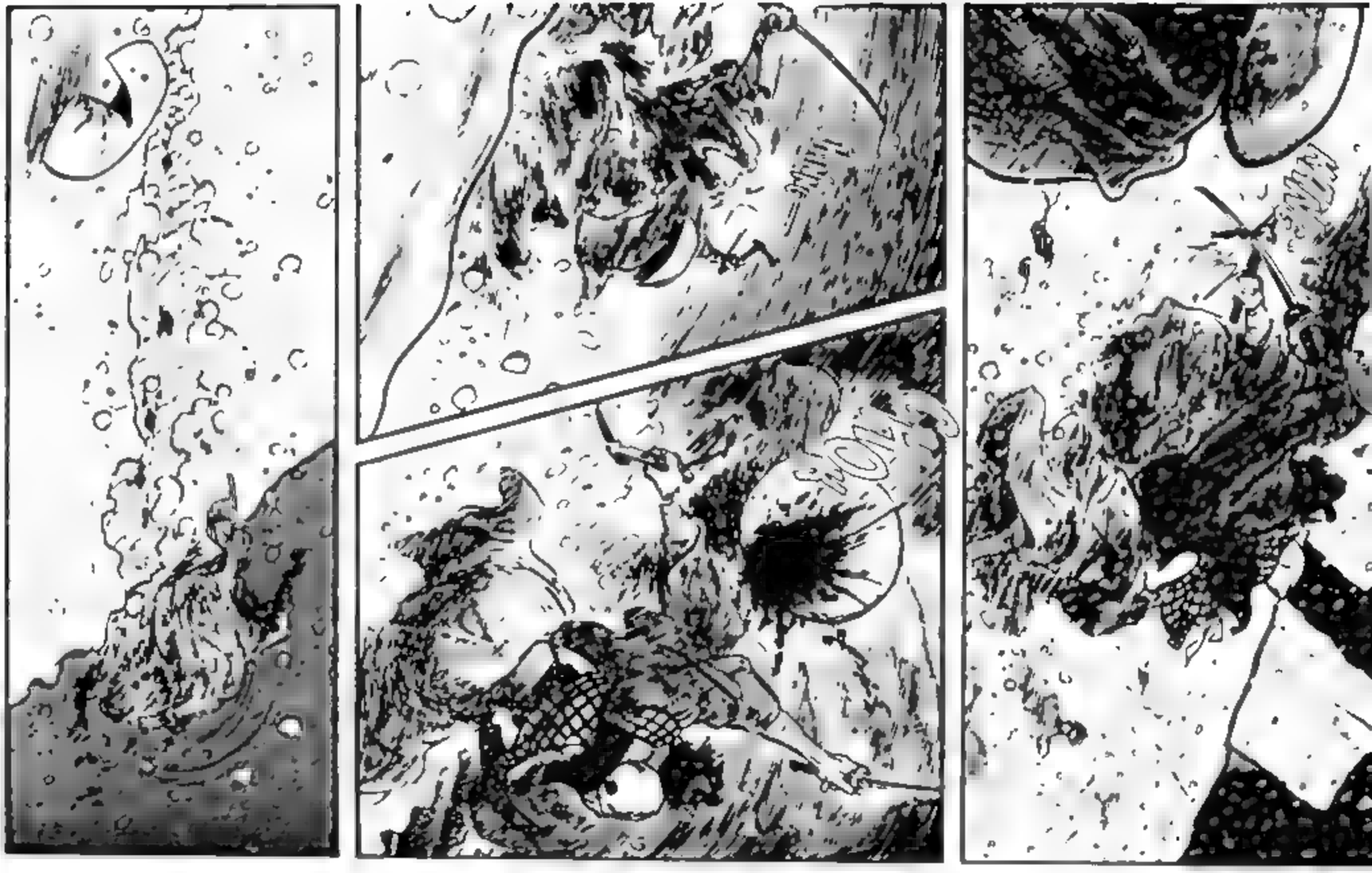
FWHOOSH
FSSH

CHK
DAIGORO!
FWHOOSHH





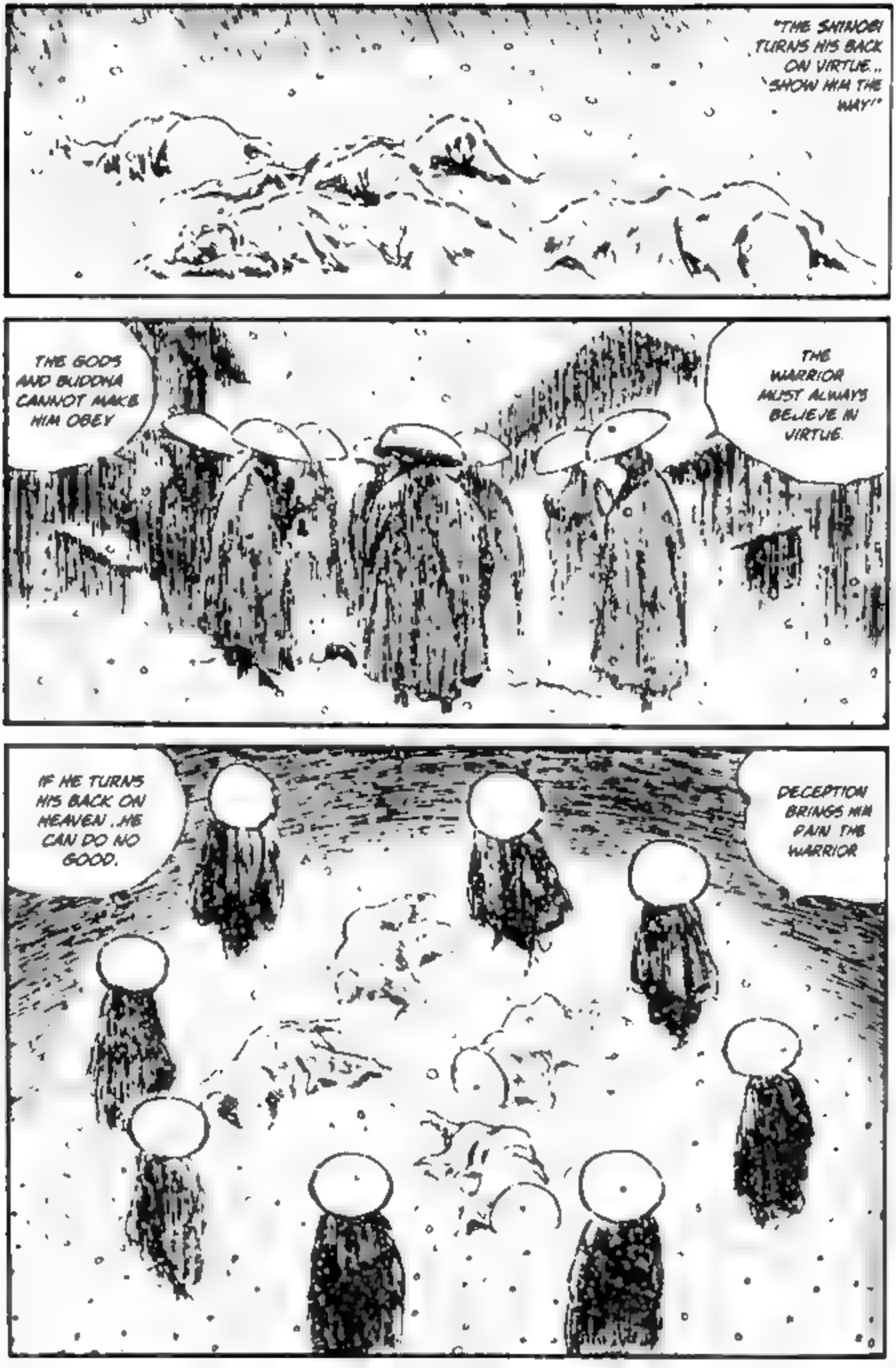
CHAK
KCHAK
SHAK

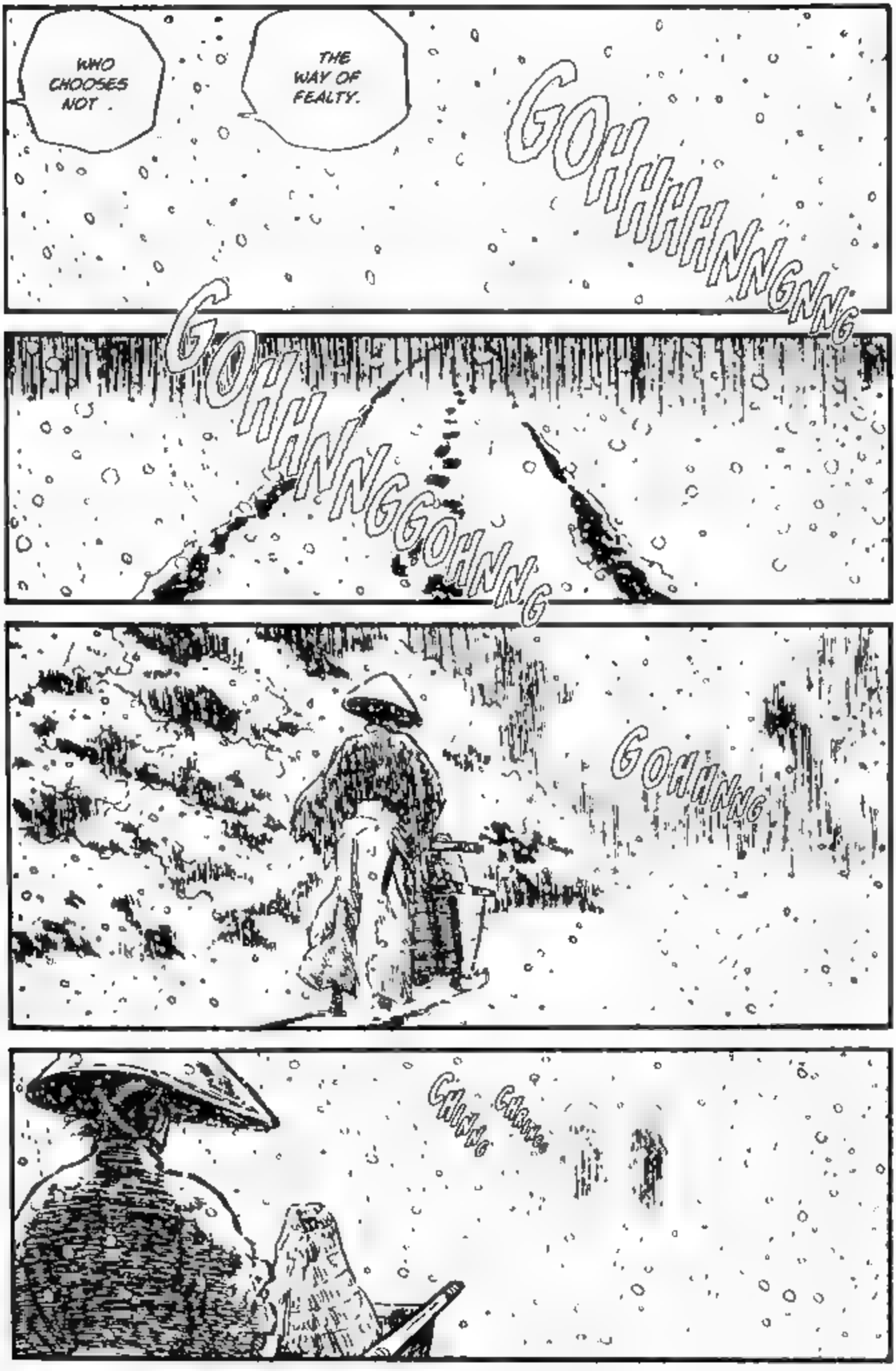


SHRUKK

HRK!

SO THE KUROKUWA HAVE SUBMITTED TO THE YAGYŪ AT LAST


"THE SAMURAI TURNS HIS BACK ON VIRTUE.. SHOW HIM THE WAY!"
THE GODS AND BUDDHA CANNOT MAKE HIM OBEY
THE WARRIOR MUST ALWAYS BELIEVE IN VIRTUE.
IF HE TURNS HIS BACK ON HEAVEN ..HE CAN DO NO GOOD.
DECEPTION BRINGS HIM PAIN THE WARRIOR


WHO CHOOSES NOT .
THE WAY OF FEALTY.
GOHHHHNNGNNG
GOHHNNGGOHNNG
GOHHNG
GHNNG GHNNG

GIRNG

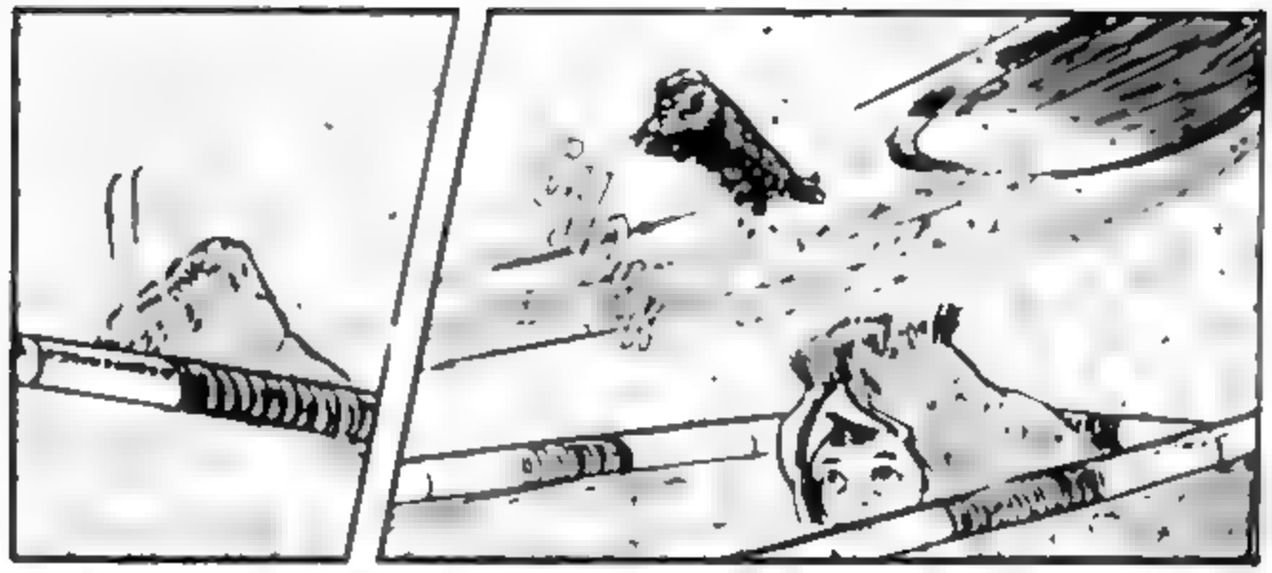
GIRNG

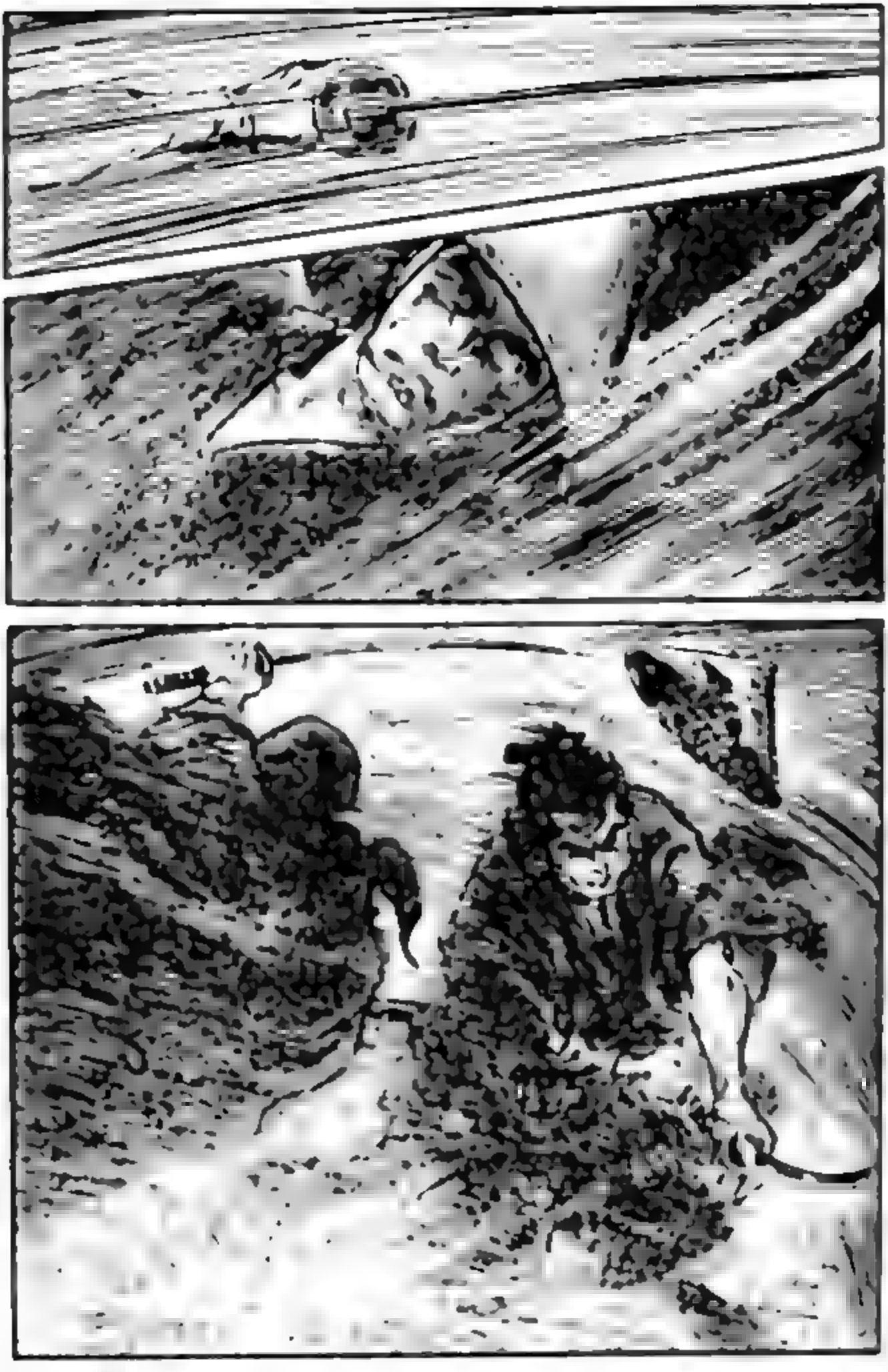
THE *SHŌGUN'S* OWN *SPIES* NOW HUNT LIKE HOUNDS AT THE COMMAND OF THE *YAGYŪ*!

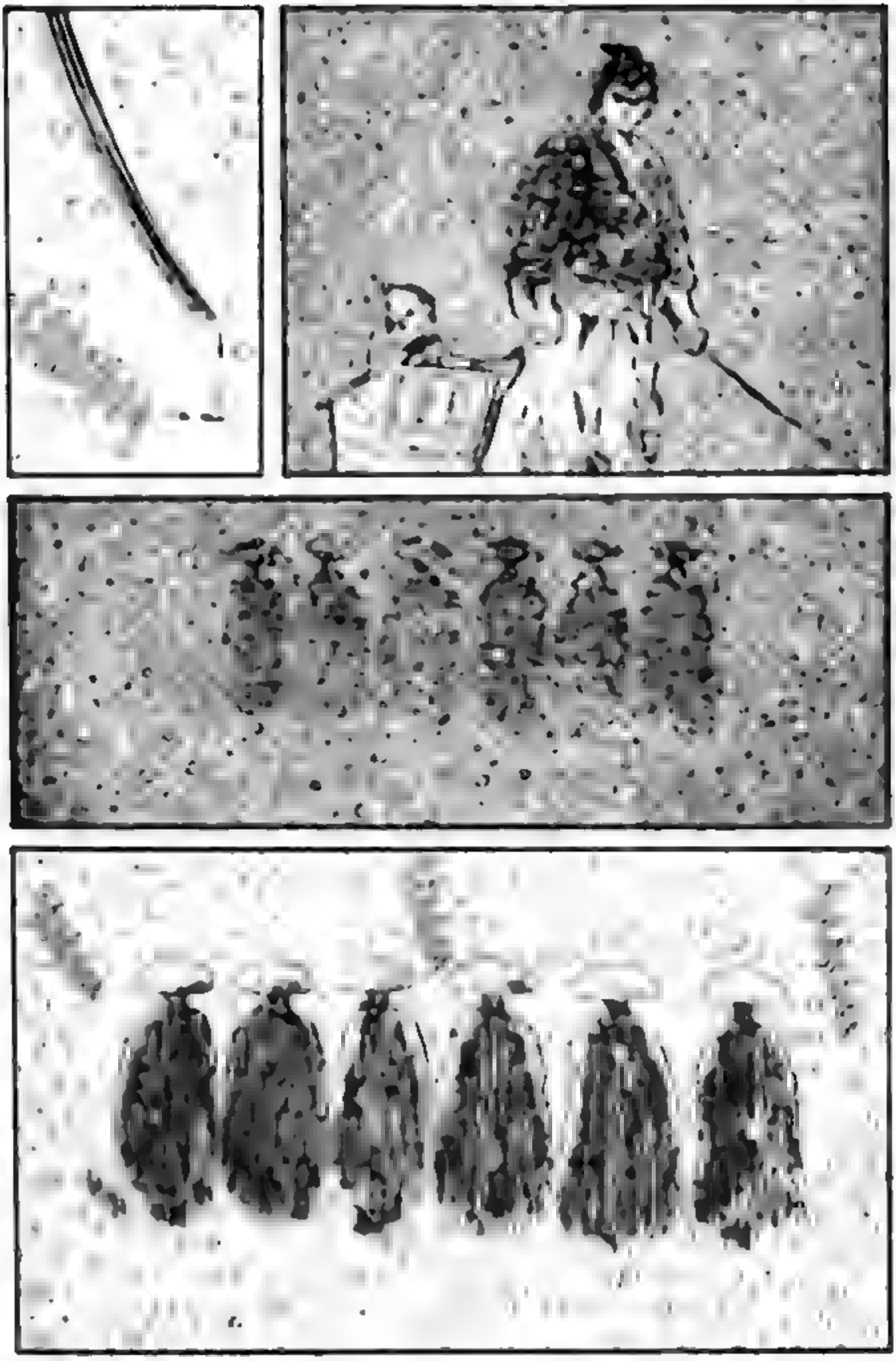
AND WHAT OF *YOU*, WHO *DEFY* THE *YAGYŪ*? YOUR *WIFE* MURDERED, YOUR *CLAN* DESTROYED, YOU WANDER *TRAGIC* THROUGH THE BLINDING SNOW.

THE *URA-YAGYŪ* NOW CONTROL THE GOVERNMENT!

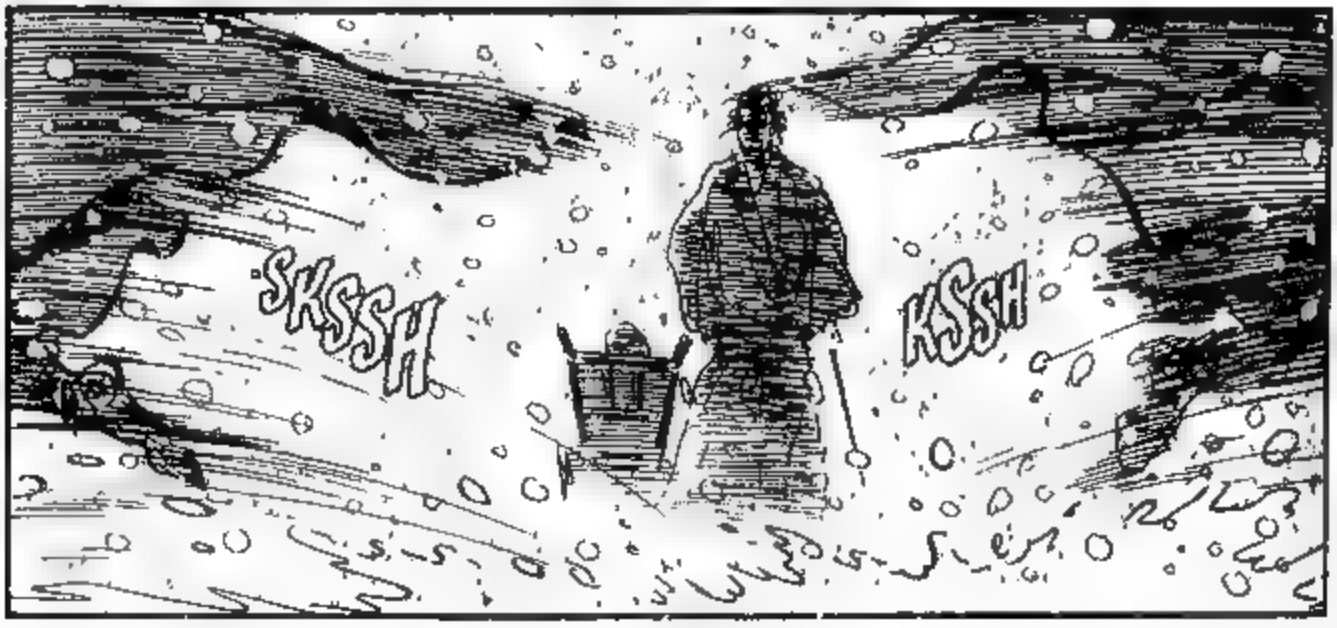
ONLY FOOLS DEFY THEM.
WE HAVE NO OPTION!
AS WELL, YOU KILLED OZUNU AND TWENTY-SIX OF OUR OWN.
TODAY, SIX MORE JOINED THEM.
ARE YOU BLIND?! RETSUDŌ USES YOU! HE DOESN'T WANT TO BLOODY HIS OWN HANDS!
NO MORE TALK!
FWHKK







CHINGG.
CHING!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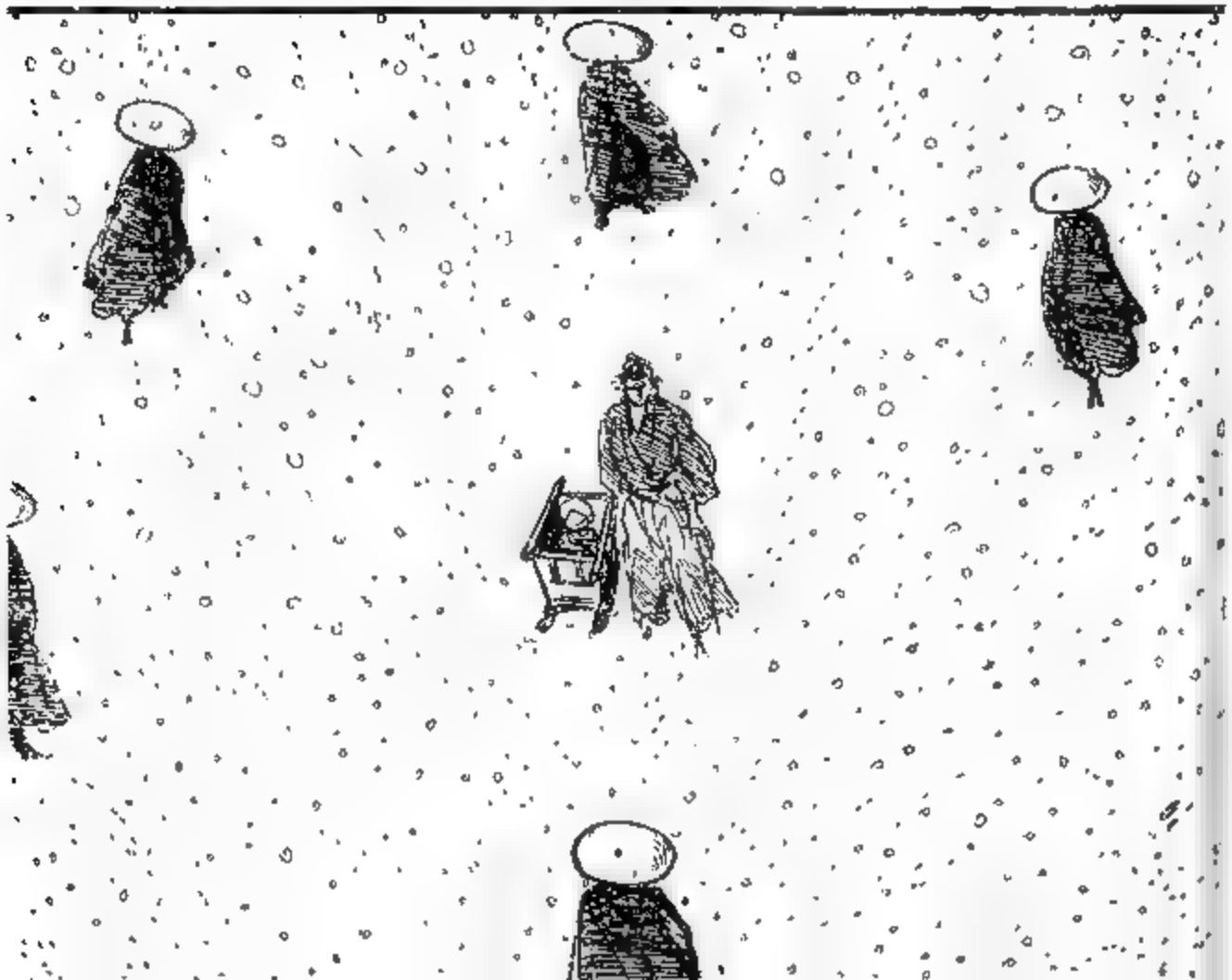
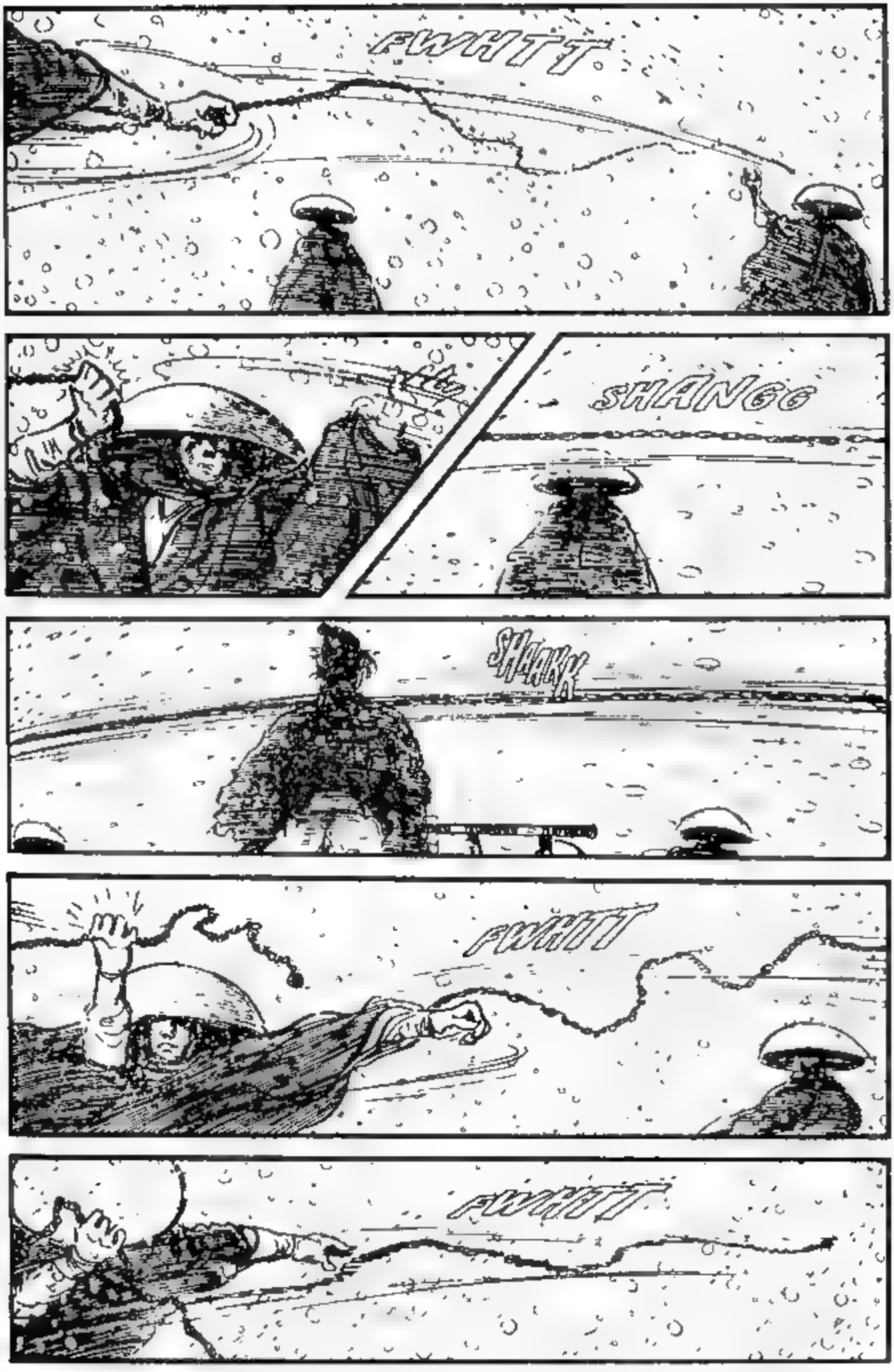
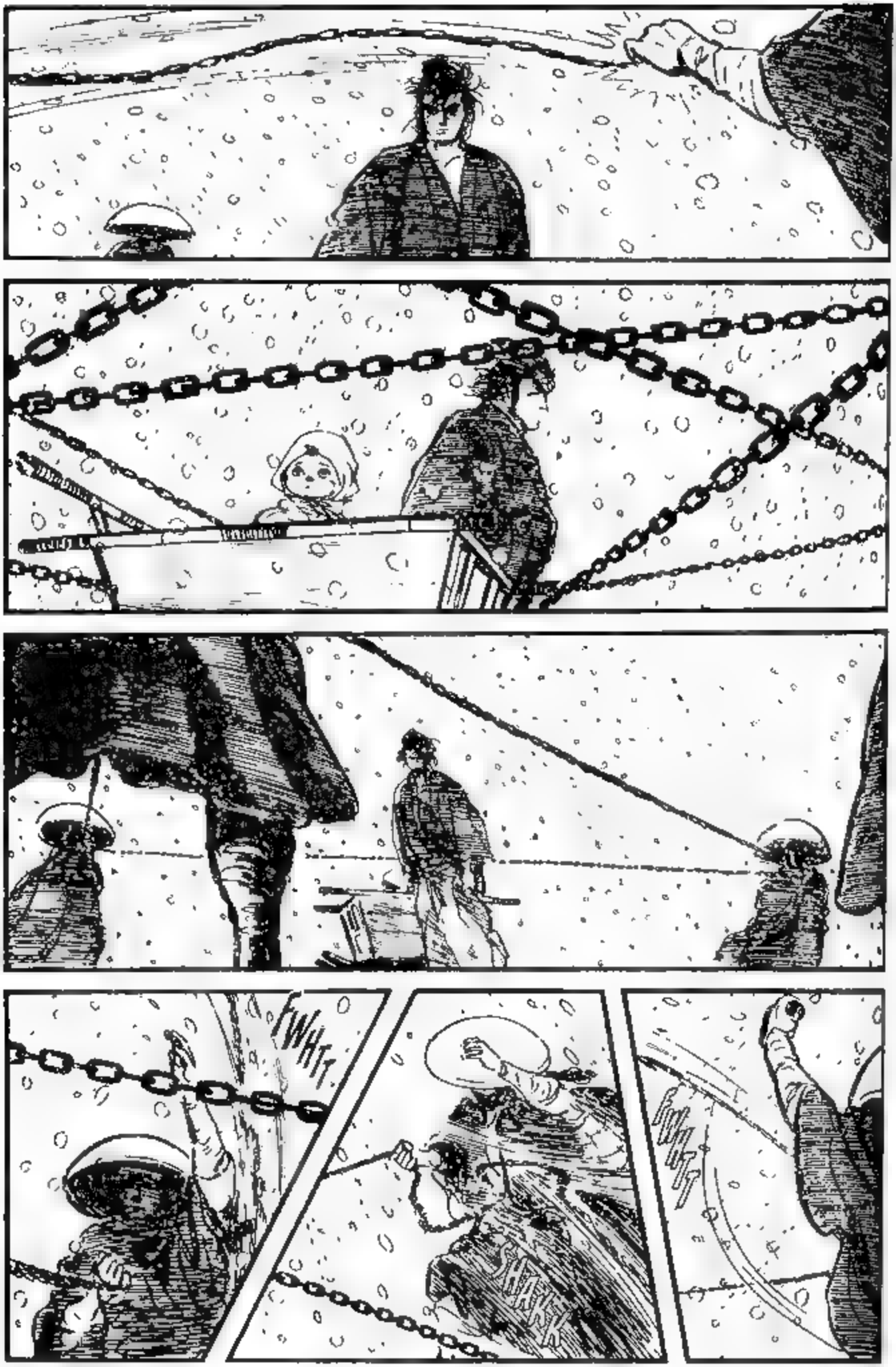
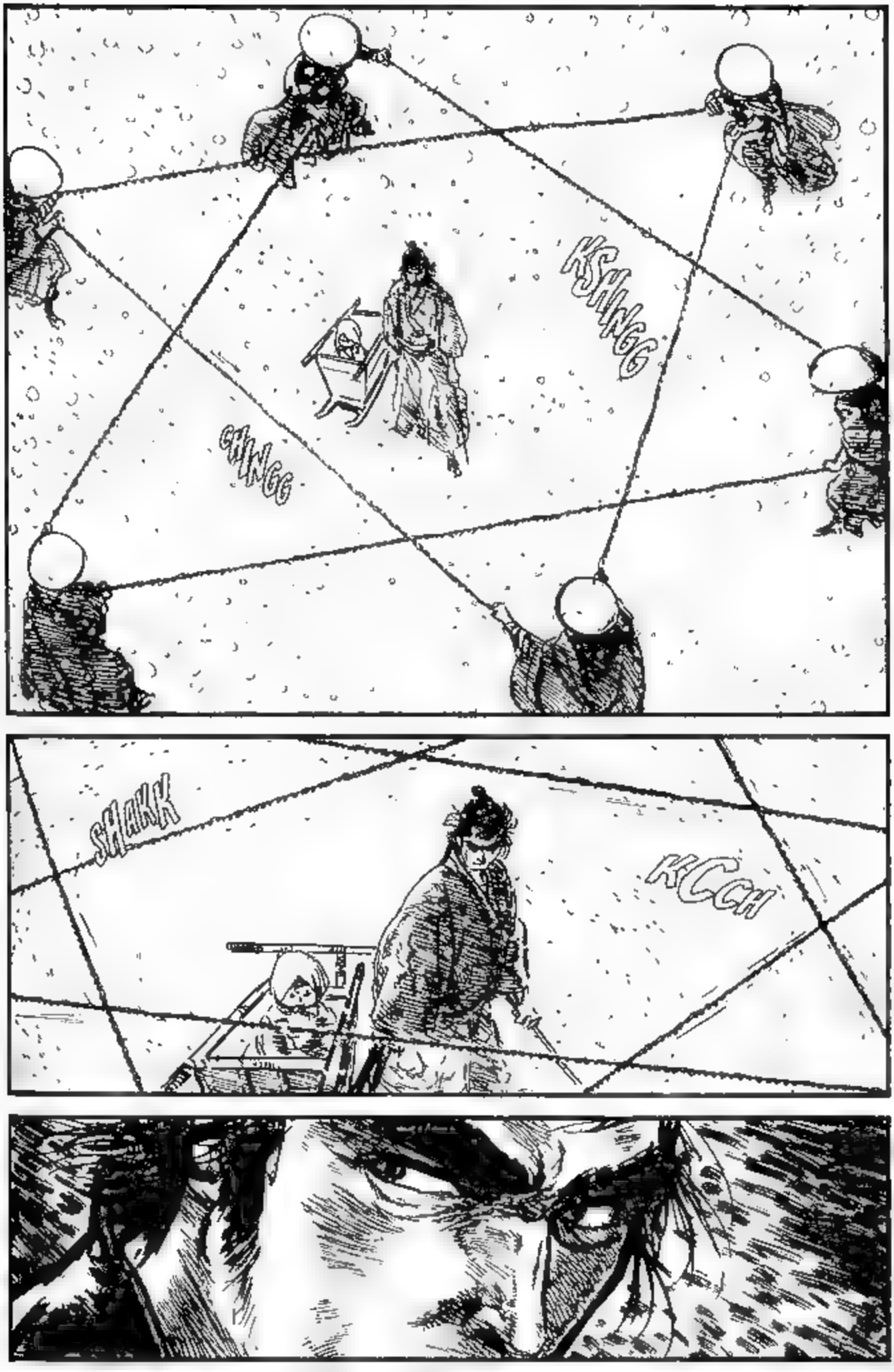
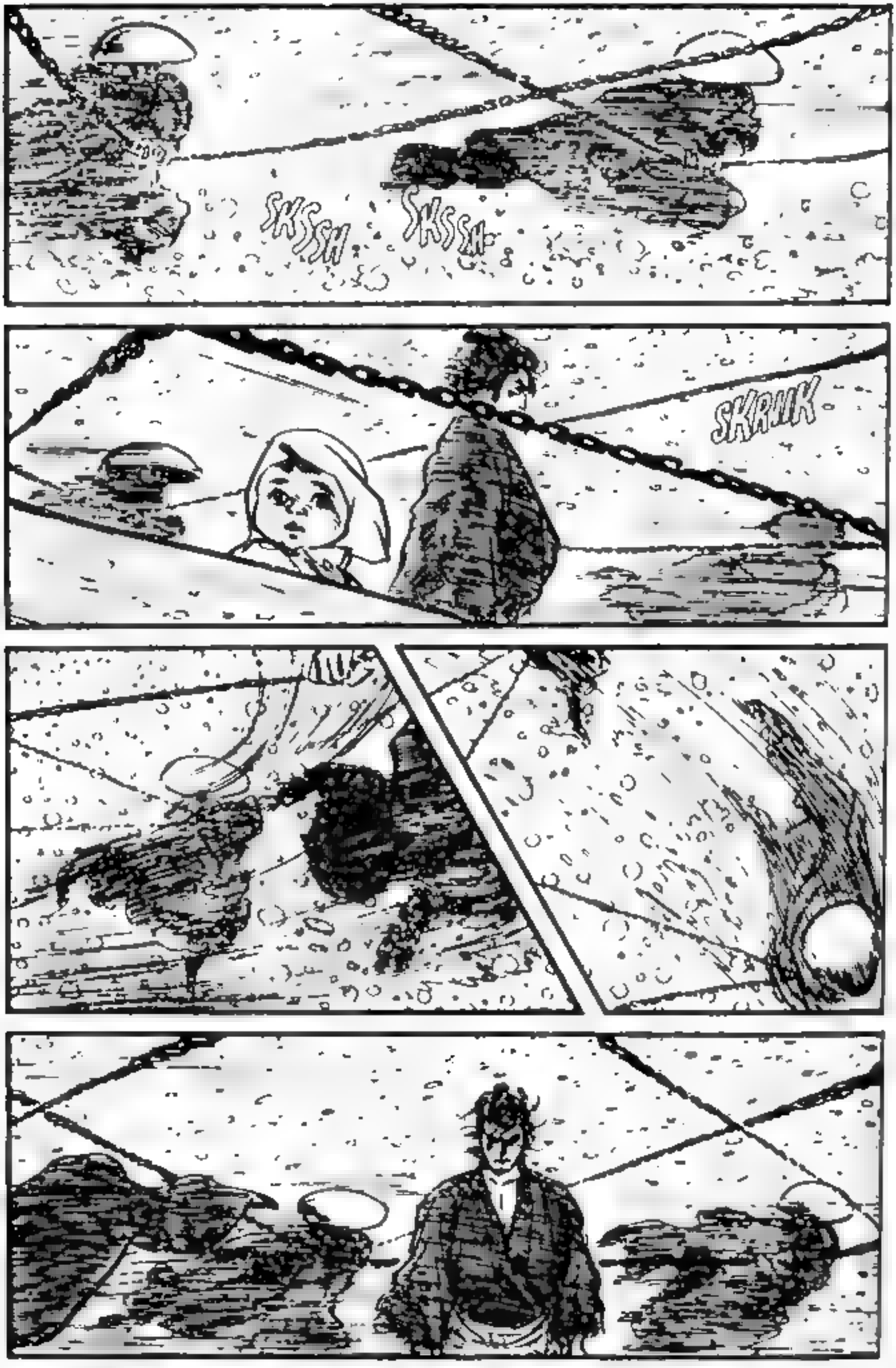
KSSH




FWHTT
SHANGG
SHAKK
FWHTT
FWHTT


FWHTT


KSHINGG
CHINGG
SHAKK
KCCH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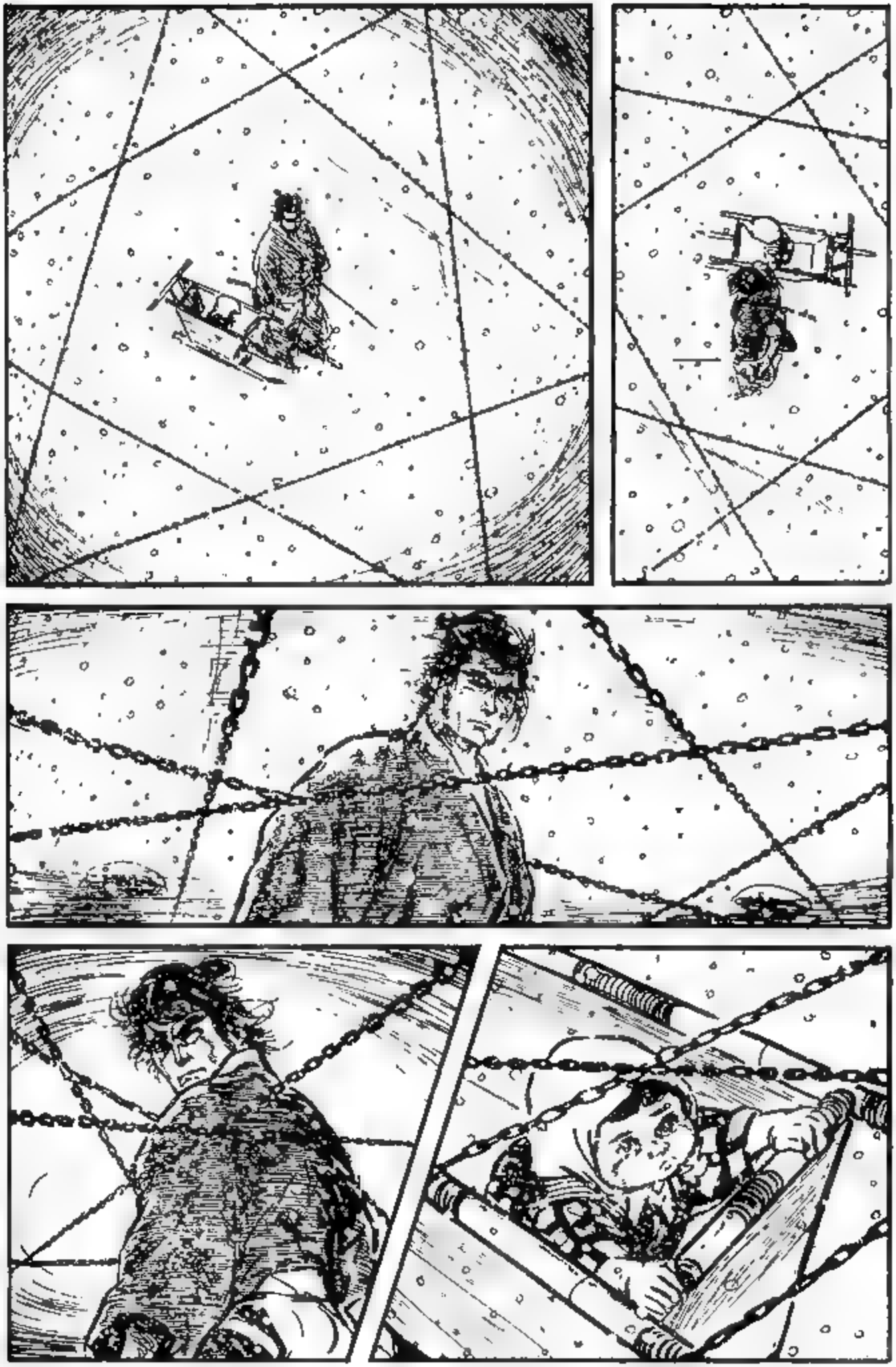
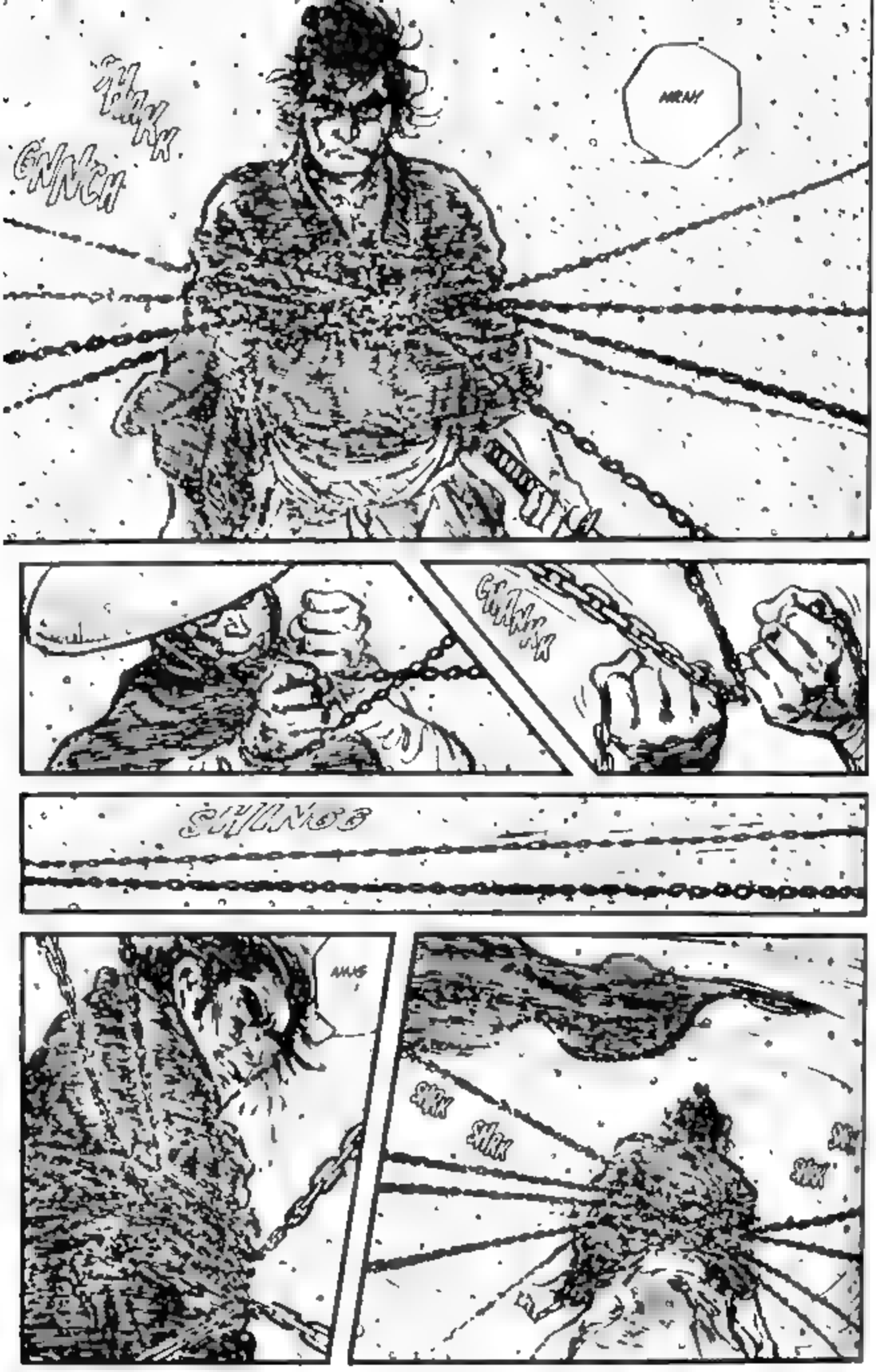
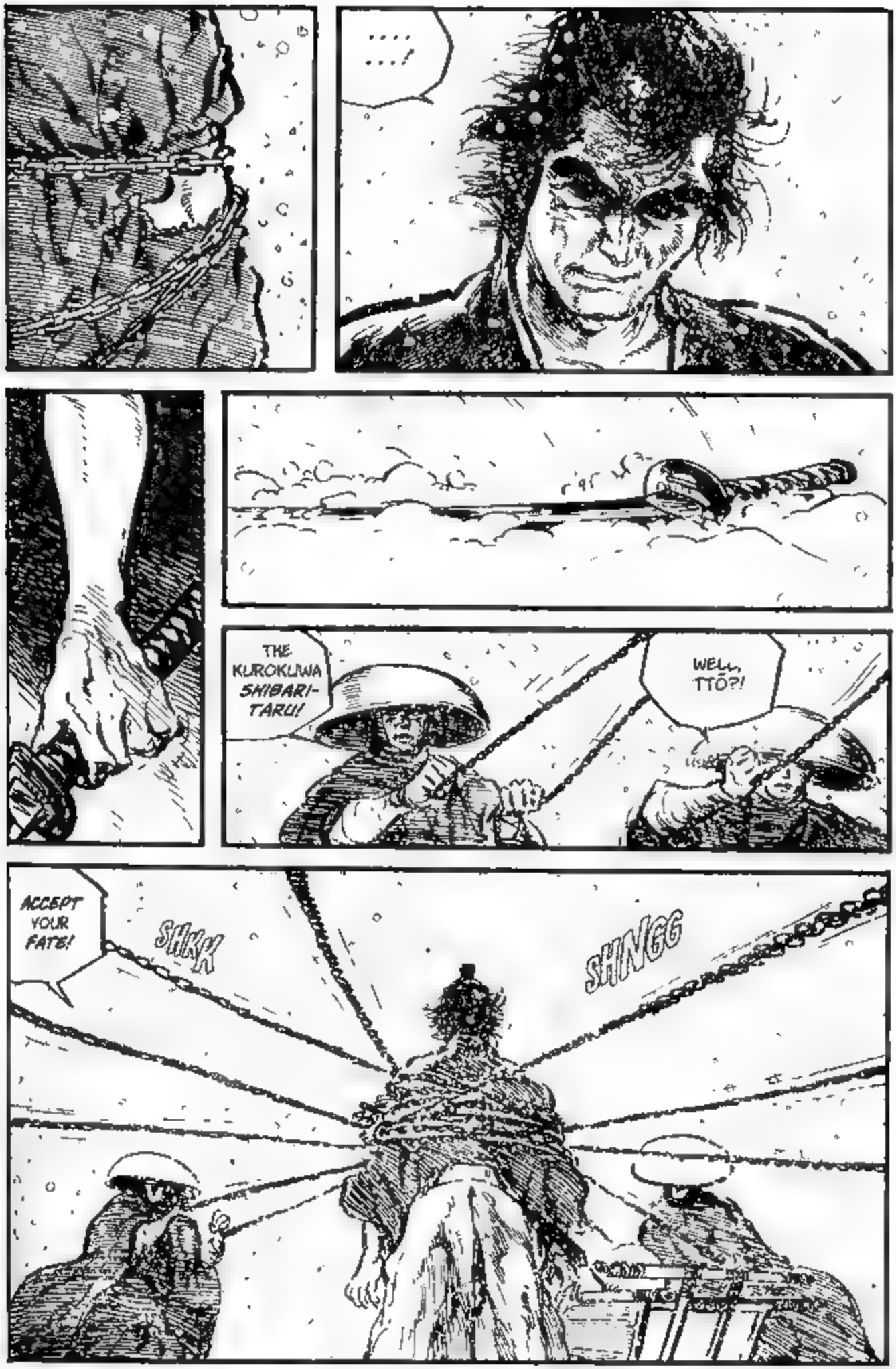
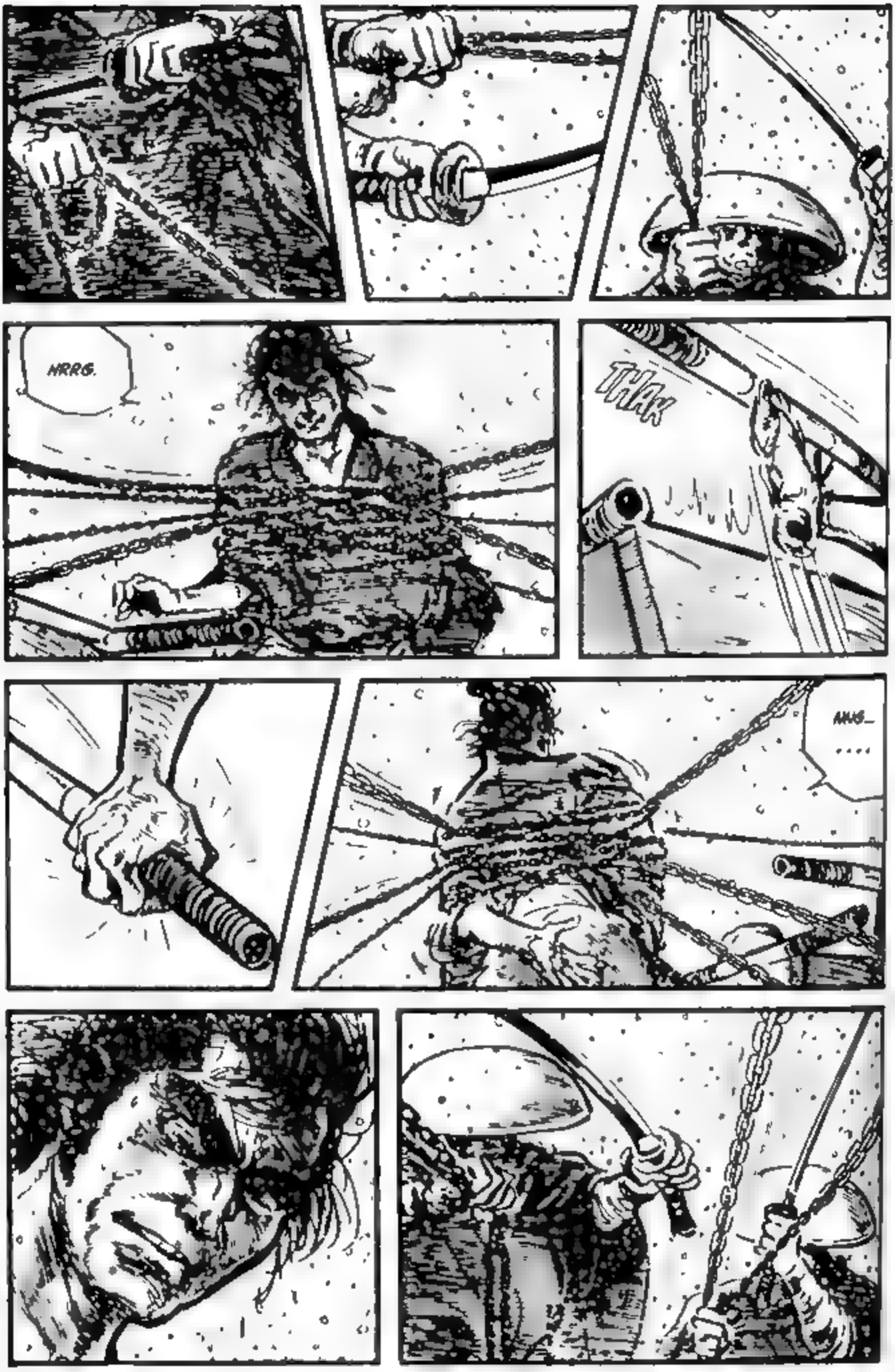
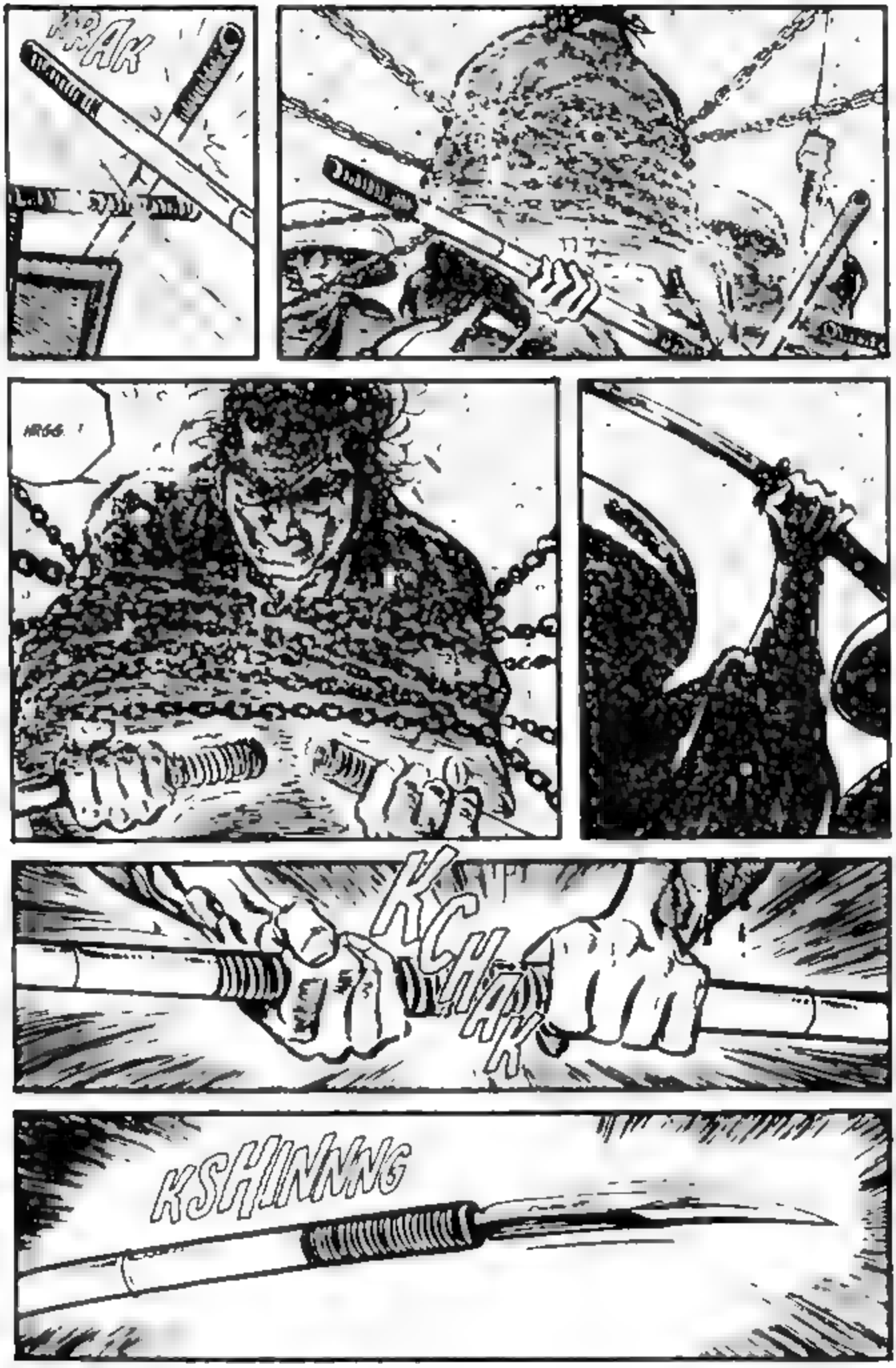
SKSSH
SKRNK

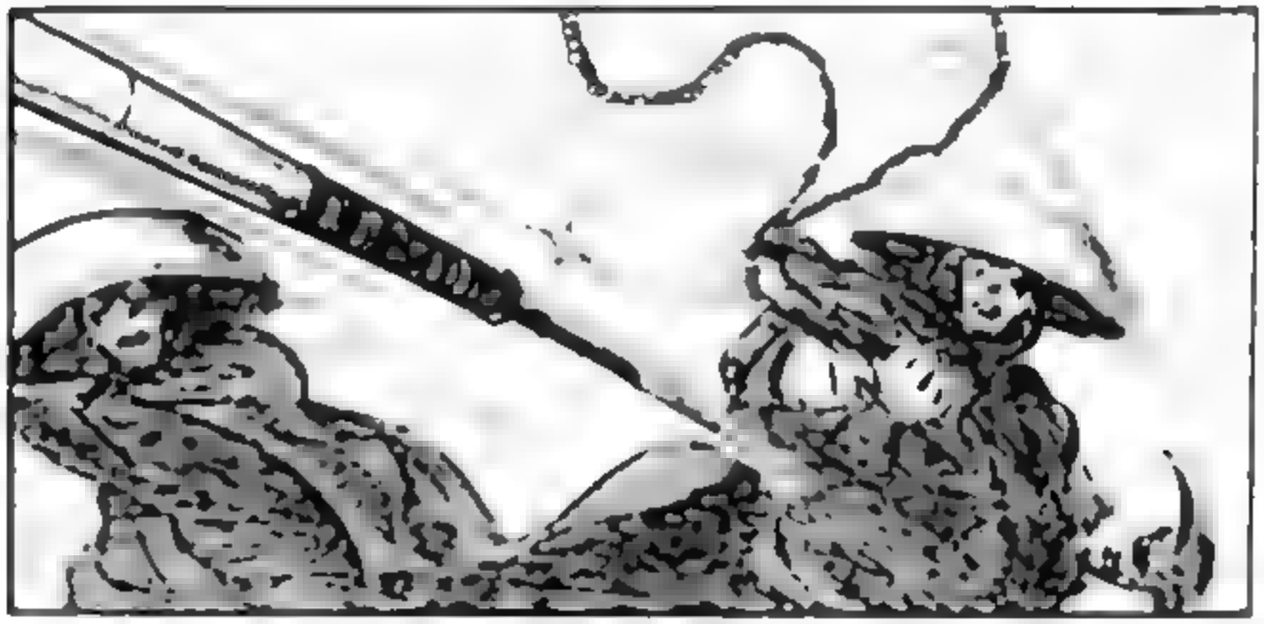



CLANK
CLANK
ARMY
SHUNK
AHHS
SHRK
SHRK
SHRK
SHRK


....!
THE KUROKUWA SHIBARI-TARU!
WELL, TTŌ?!
ACCEPT YOUR FATE!
SHKK
SHINGG

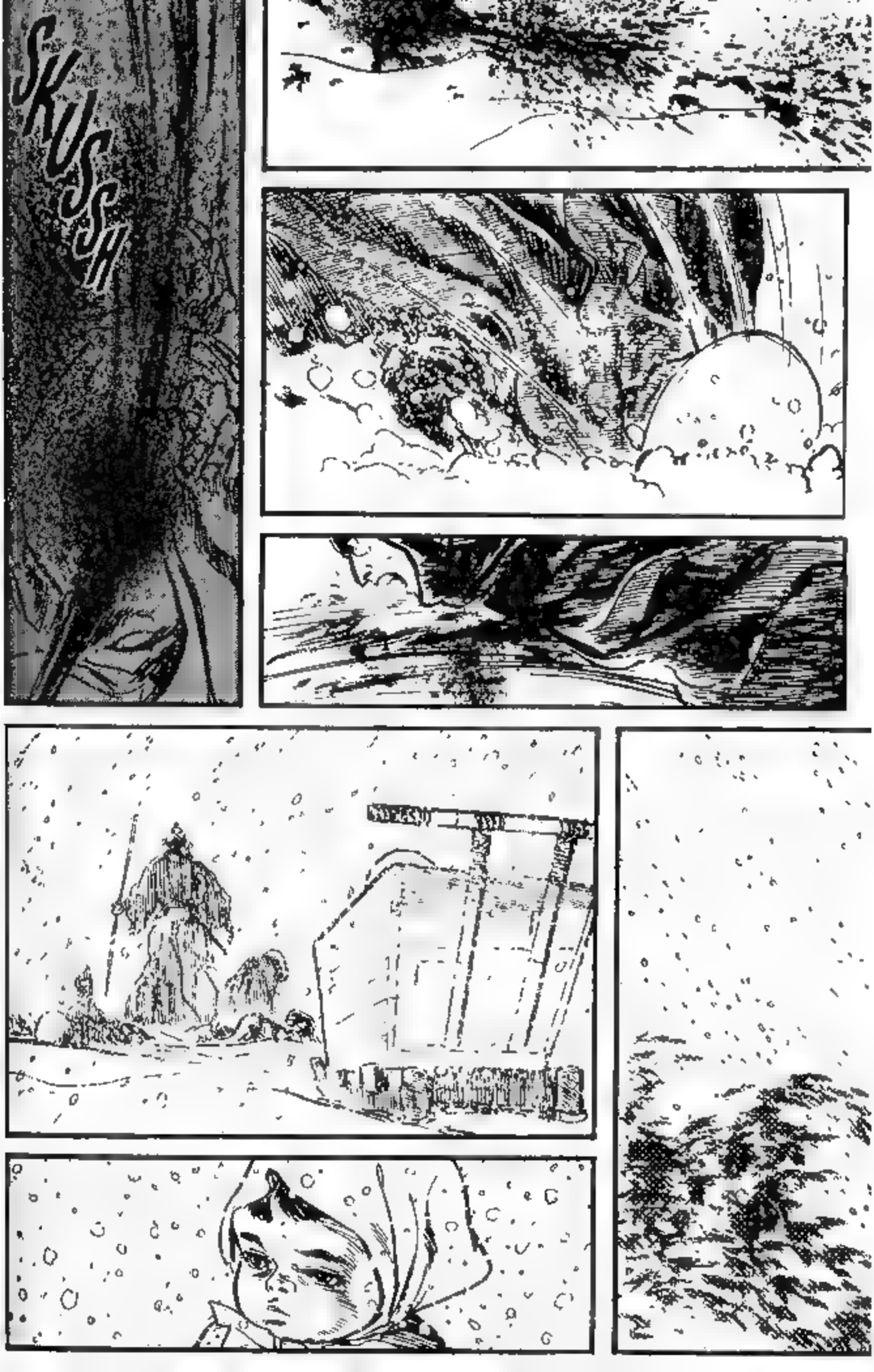

HRRG.
THAK
AHHG_

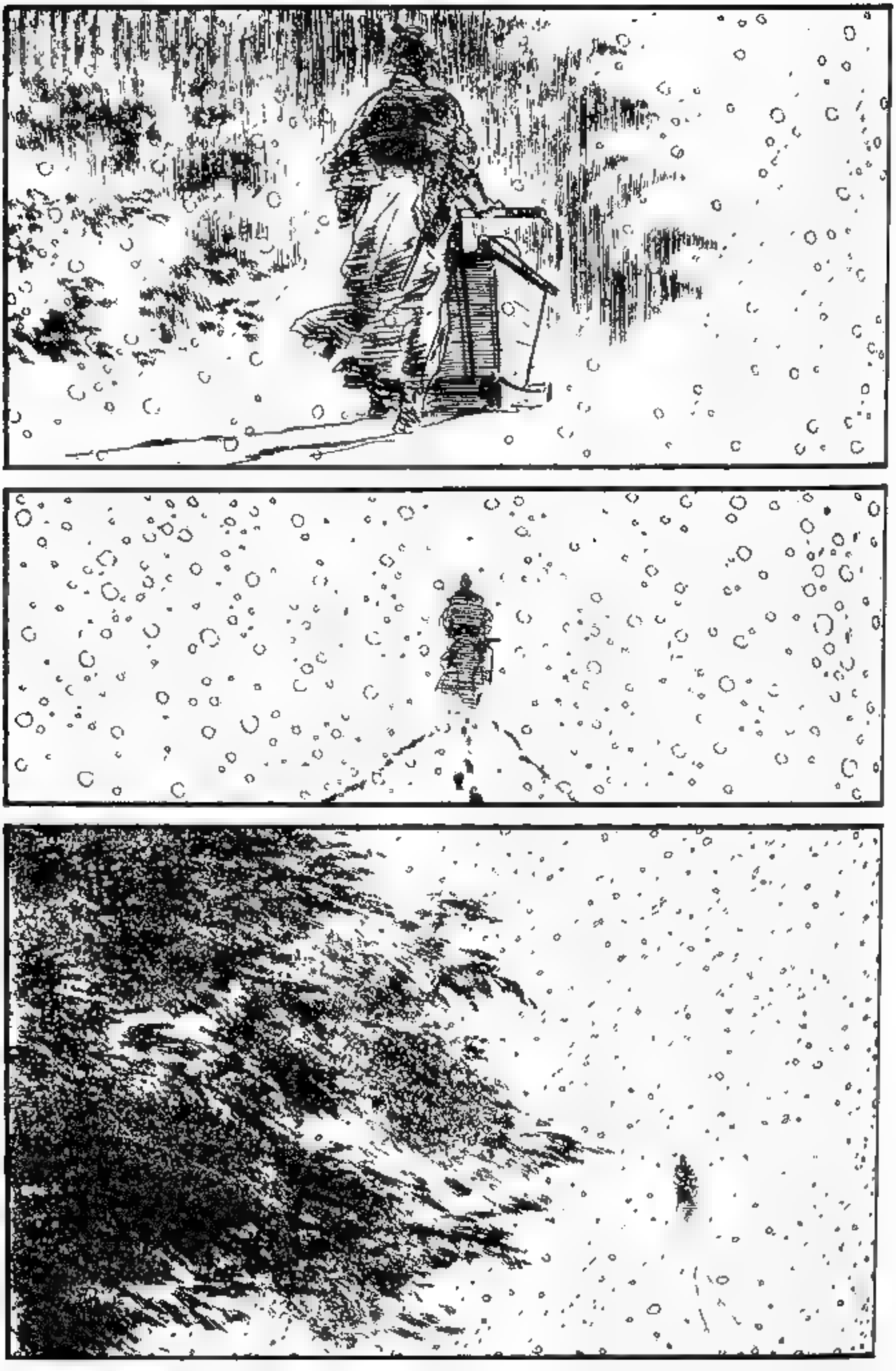

KRAK
HRGG..!
KCHK
KSHINNNG



SKLGGH

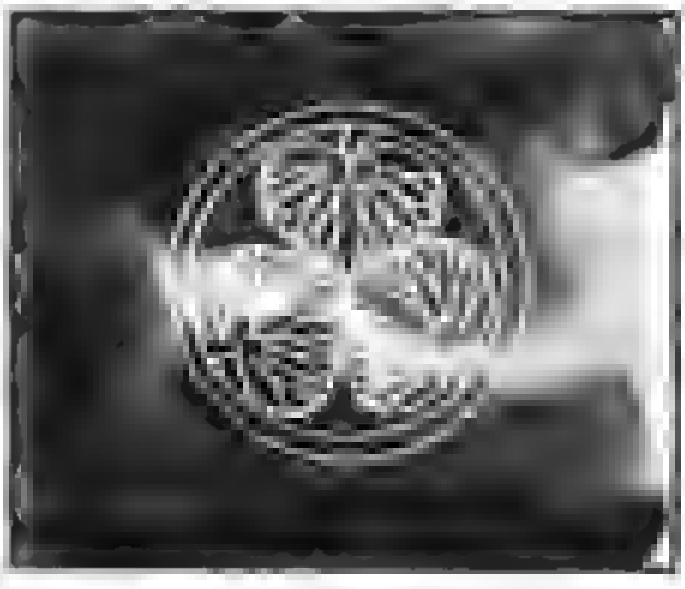
GCHOK

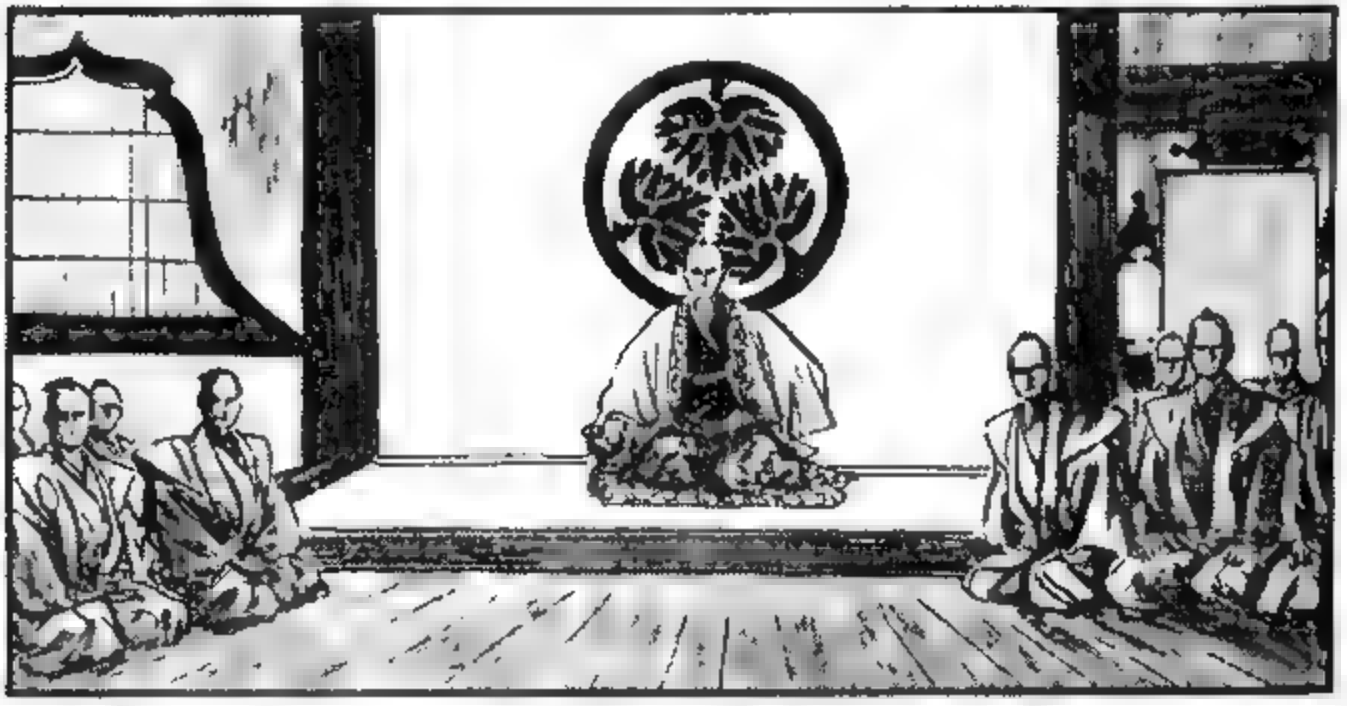

SKUSH



the forty-second

The Infinite Path

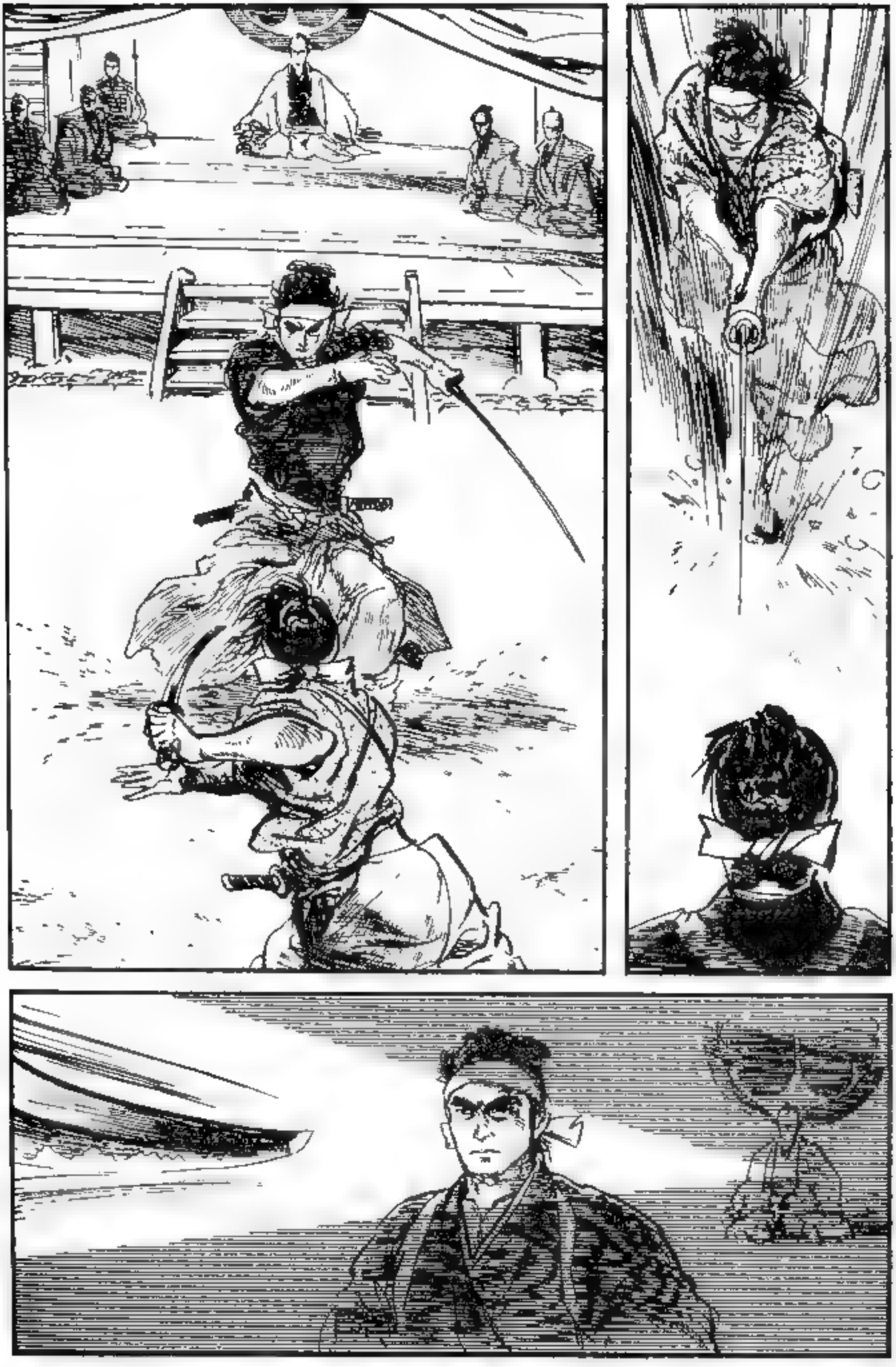


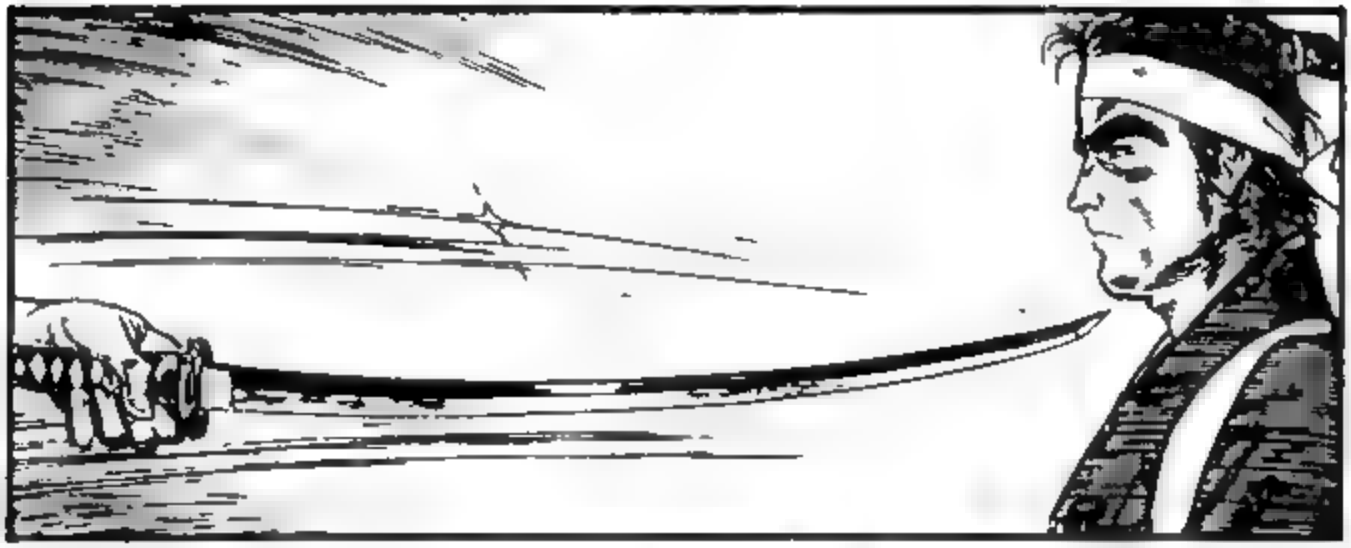


YAGYŪ
GUNBEI-
DONO!

WHOSH
TANNG
SKRKK

KSSH
SLINGG





LORD YAGYŪ! GUNBEI-SAMA HAS TRIUMPHED!

THE POST OF *KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN* IS OURS AT LAST

GUNBE IS A SIMPLE *FOOL!* WHY DIDN'T HE RUN ŌGAMI ITTŌ *THROUGH?!*

SHOWING OFF HIS CONTROL! *FLAUNTING* HIS SUPERIORITY! THE DAMNED *AMATEUR!*

IF HE'D *KILLED* ITTŌ ON THE SPOT

THE *YAGYU* NAME COULD STILL BE SAVED!

WHY DIDN'T HE *KILL?!*

BUT NOW THE CRUCIAL POST OF *KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN* WILL GO TO THE *ŌGAMI* CLAN!

THE SHŌGUN AND HIS ENTOURAGE *BAKKAKU* WILL DISTRUST THE *YAGYŪ* FOREVER!

WH-WHAT DO YOU MEAN?!
GET ME GUNBEI! EVERY SECOND COUNTS!
HE. HE SHOULD BE ON HIS WAY HERE..
THEN SEND OUT A MESSENGER TO TELL HIM TO RIDE LIKE THE WIND!
THE FATE OF THE YAGYŪ HANGS IN THE BALANCE!
THOKKA

ТНОККАТТА
ТНОККА

THD THD THD
FATHER! I WON!
AT LAST, THE POST OF KŌGI KAISHAKU-NIN IS IN OUR HANDS!
AND SO, MY LORD?! WHY THE URGENT CALL?
AH! TO SHARE YOUR JOY, NO DOUBT!
GUNBEI! LEAVE EDO NOW!
WH- WHAT?!
THERE'S AN ASSAS-SINATION UP NORTH!
DO IT, THEN GO TO GROUND! VANISH FROM THIS EARTH!

BUT BUT, FATHER! I'VE DEFEATED ITTŌ! I'LL BE KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN! WHY THE NORTH-LANDS. ?!
YOU FOOL!!
ŌGAMI ITTŌ SHALL BE KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN!
WHAT ...?!
DURING THE DUEL, THE TIP OF YOUR SWORD POINTED AT THE SHŌGUN!
ITTŌ SACRIFICED HIMSELF TO BLOCK IT!
?!
THE SWORDS OF THE YAGYŪ ARE THE SWORDS OF ASSASSINS! THE SHŌGUN'S ASSASSINS!
FOR IT TO EVEN APPEAR THAT WE'VE TURNED UPON OUR MASTER IS BEYOND PARDON!
IF YOU'D RUN HIM THROUGH, WE COULD SAY YOU LOST YOUR HEAD IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE! BUT NO!! YOU STOPPED YOUR SWORD IN THE FINAL INSTANT TO FLAUNT YOUR TECHNIQUE! WHO WILL BELIEVE US NOW?! NO ONE!!

BUT . BUT .
RNG!
HNG!
KRAK
AAGH!
WHOK
EVEN IF IT WAS CHANCE THAT ITTŌ BLOCKED YOUR SWORD, IT LOOKS LIKE HE SURRENDERED HIS LIFE FOR THE SHŌGUN!
WHAK
KRAK
WHEN WILL YOU LEARN, YOU BRAINLESS DOLT?!
WINNING ISN'T ENOUGH!

BUT, FATHER!
THERE HAS BEEN NO OFFICIAL—
KRAK
STILL YOU TALK BACK?!
WHRAK
YOU DRIVE US TO THE BRINK OF DESTRUCTION, AND STILL YOU BABBLE ON LIKE A CHILD?!
GO NORTH! GO NOW!
SUMMON GORŌSA!

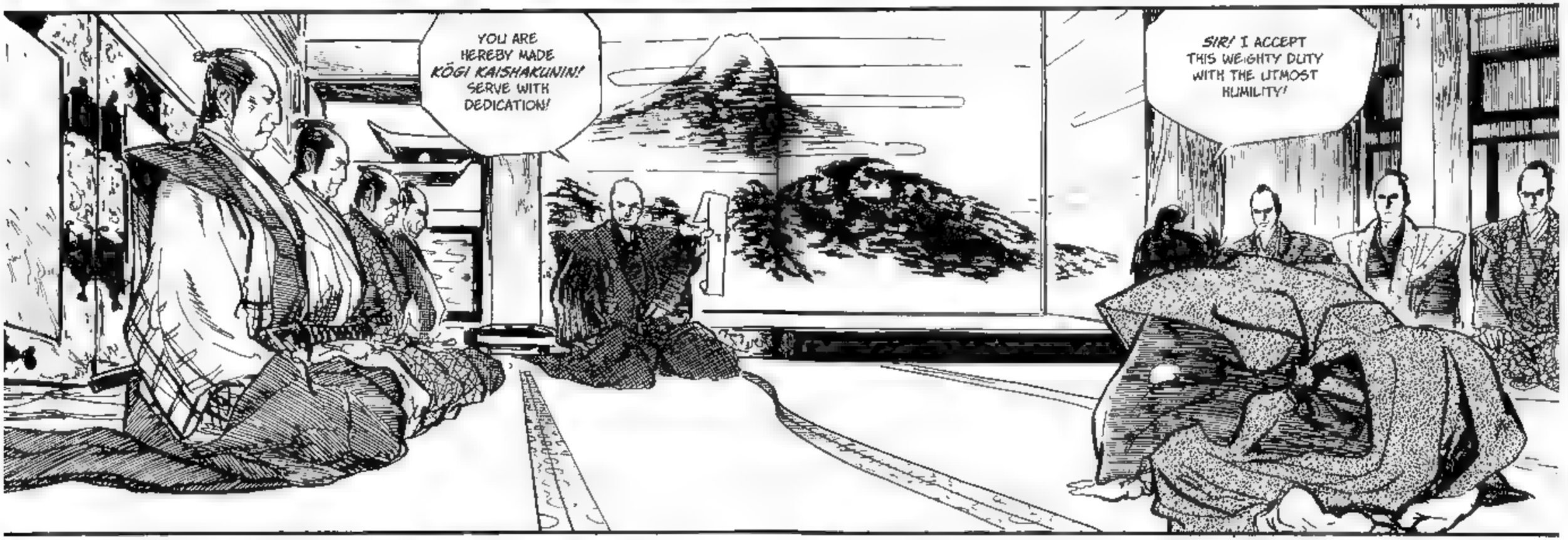
GORŌSA! YOU ARE GUNBEI'S KAGEMUSHA—HIS DOUBLE! NOW IT IS TIME FOR YOU TO SERVE THE CLAN!
MY LORD!
THE YAGYŪ IS ALL! WILL YOU DIE FOR US?!
JOY-FULLY, MY LORD.
THEN CUT YOUR STOM-ACH!
MY LORD!

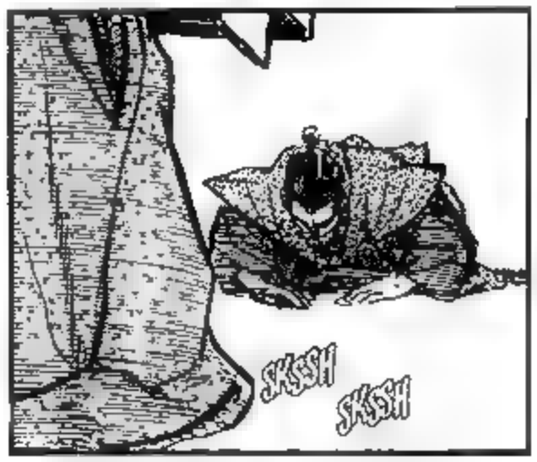
ТИУССН
WHOK

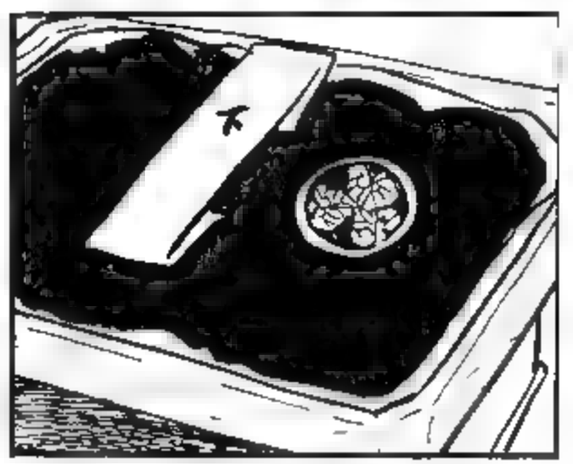
ŌGAMI ITTŌ HAS DEFEATED THE SWORDS OF THE *YAGYŪ* FROM NOW ON THE ŌGAMI CLAN WILL BE *KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN*, *ITTŌ* WILL WEAR THE HOLLYHOCK CREST OF THE *SHŌGUN*.
IT WILL BE *ITTŌ* WHO WILL STRIKE *FEAR* INTO THE HEARTS OF *DAIMYŌ* THROUGHOUT THE LAND. THE FAME OF HIS SWORD AND HIS WARRIOR SPIRIT [redacted]LL *SOAR!*

AND AS HE RISES, THE YAGYŪ WILL FALL SHORT IN COMPARISON.
WE CAN AVOID PUNISHMENT BY DISGUISING GOROSA'S KUBI AS GUNBEI'S.
BUT THE STAIN OF THIS CALAMITY SHALL LINGER FOR GENERATIONS!
IT'S EASY ENOUGH TO KILL ŌGAMI ITTŌ, BUT THAT WOULDN'T ERASE THE STIGMA!
WE NEED A SCHEME TO MAKE IT APPEAR THAT HE BETRAYS THE SHŌGUN! HIS FAMILY NAME MUST BE ERASED!
THIS SHALL TAKE TIME...
SO WE WILL BEGIN IMMEDIATELY!

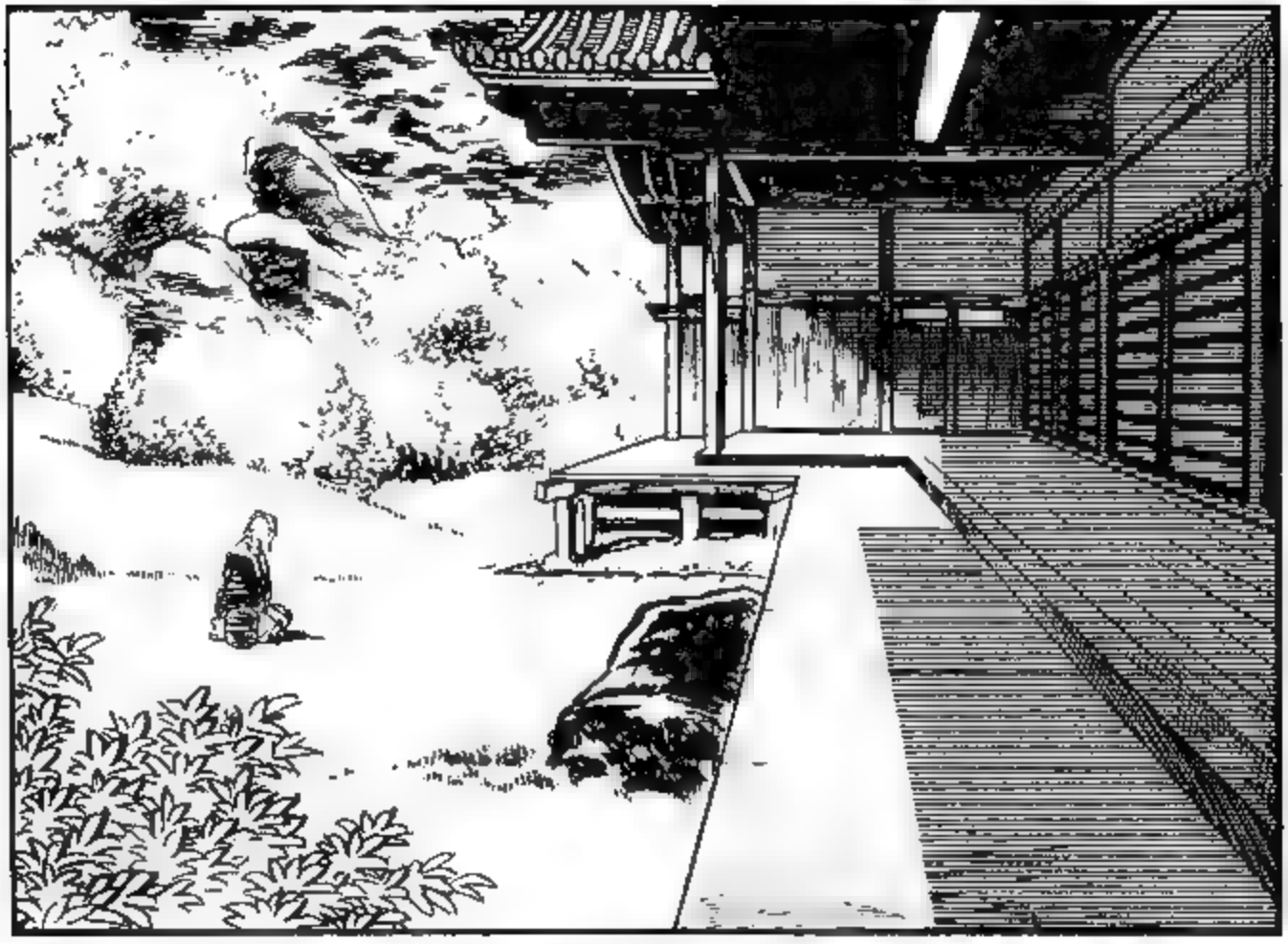
ŌGAMI ITTŌ! RECEIVE THIS HONOR!

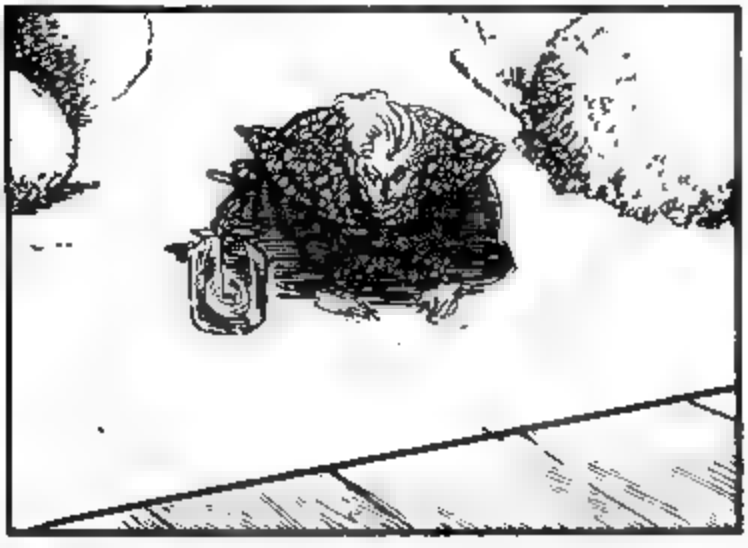

YOU ARE HEREBY MADE KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN! SERVE WITH DEDICATION!
SIR! I ACCEPT THIS WEIGHTY DUTY WITH THE UTMOST HUMILITY!


SKSSH
SKSSH



PERMIS-
SION TO
SPEAK, MY
LORD!
YAGYŪ BIZEN
COMES BEFORE
YOU ON URGENT
BUSINESS.
WHAT
IS IT?!
MY FATHER RETSUDŌ
BEGS THE WILL OF THE
GO-RŌJŪ-SAMA. HE WAITS
IN THE GARDEN OF THE
WEST CORRIDOR.
RETSUDŌ-
DONO ?
IN THE
GARDEN?
PASSING
STRANGE.
SKSSH
SKSSH





YAGYŪ-
DONO WHAT
BUSINESS HAVE
YOU WITH THE
RŌJŪ?

MY LORD'S WHEREAS YAGYU GUNBEI
IN THIS RECENT DUEL DID GRIEVOUSLY OFFEND OUR LORD THE SHOGUN
HE HAS, IN PENANCE FOR THE DIRECTION OF HIS SWORD
..COMMITTED SEPPUKU!!

PLEASE CONVEY THESE FACTS TO OUR LORD THE SHŌGUN
I CRAVE YOUR INDULGENCE
ŌGAMI DONO!
YOUR SWORDSMANSHIP WAS MAGNIFICENT
IN COMPARISON, I AM MORTIFIED BY GUNBEI'S IMMATURITY

MY LORDS, OBSERVE FOR YOURSELF!

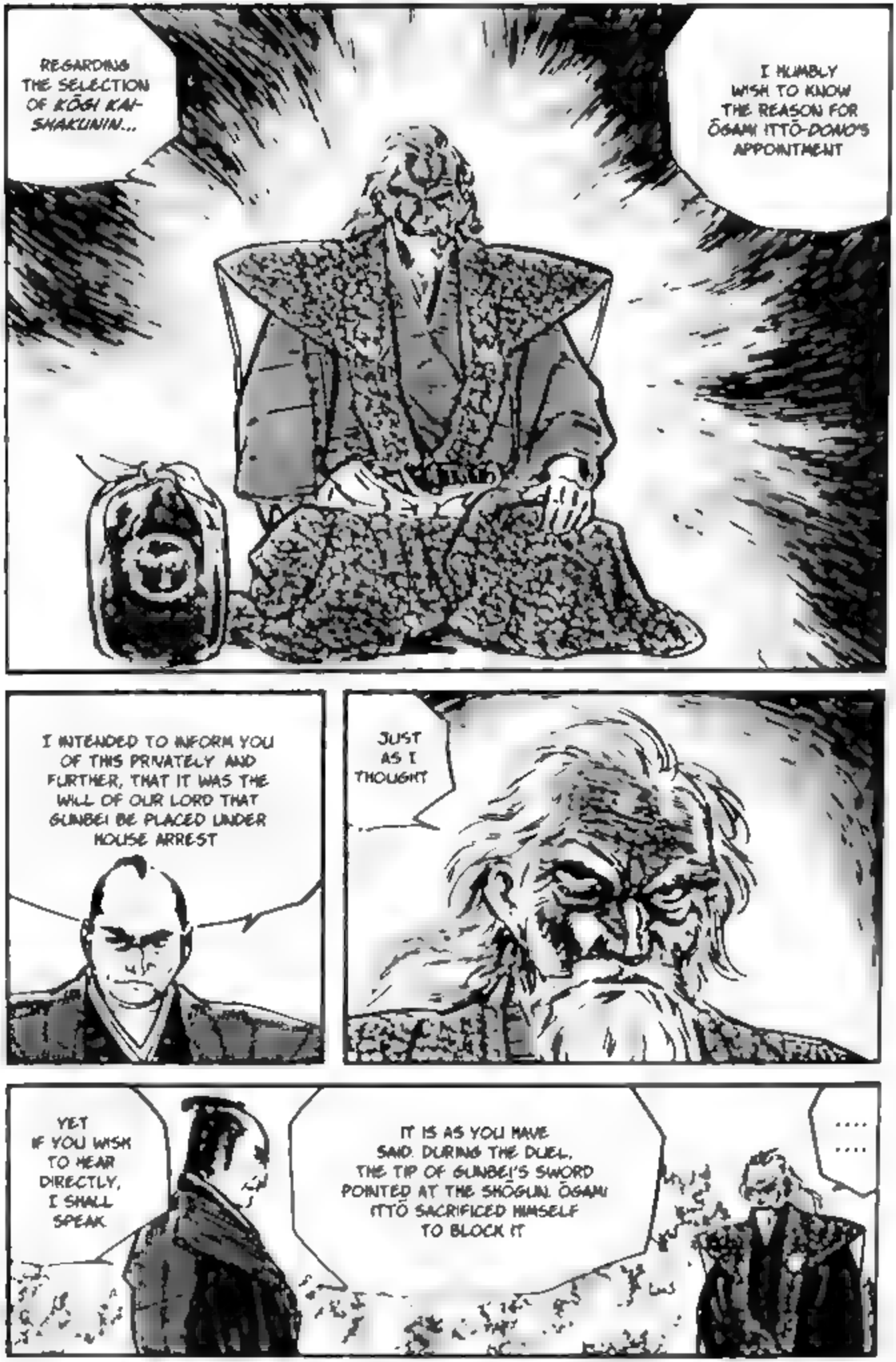
GUNBEI'S CRIME DESERVED *TEN THOUSAND* DEATHS.

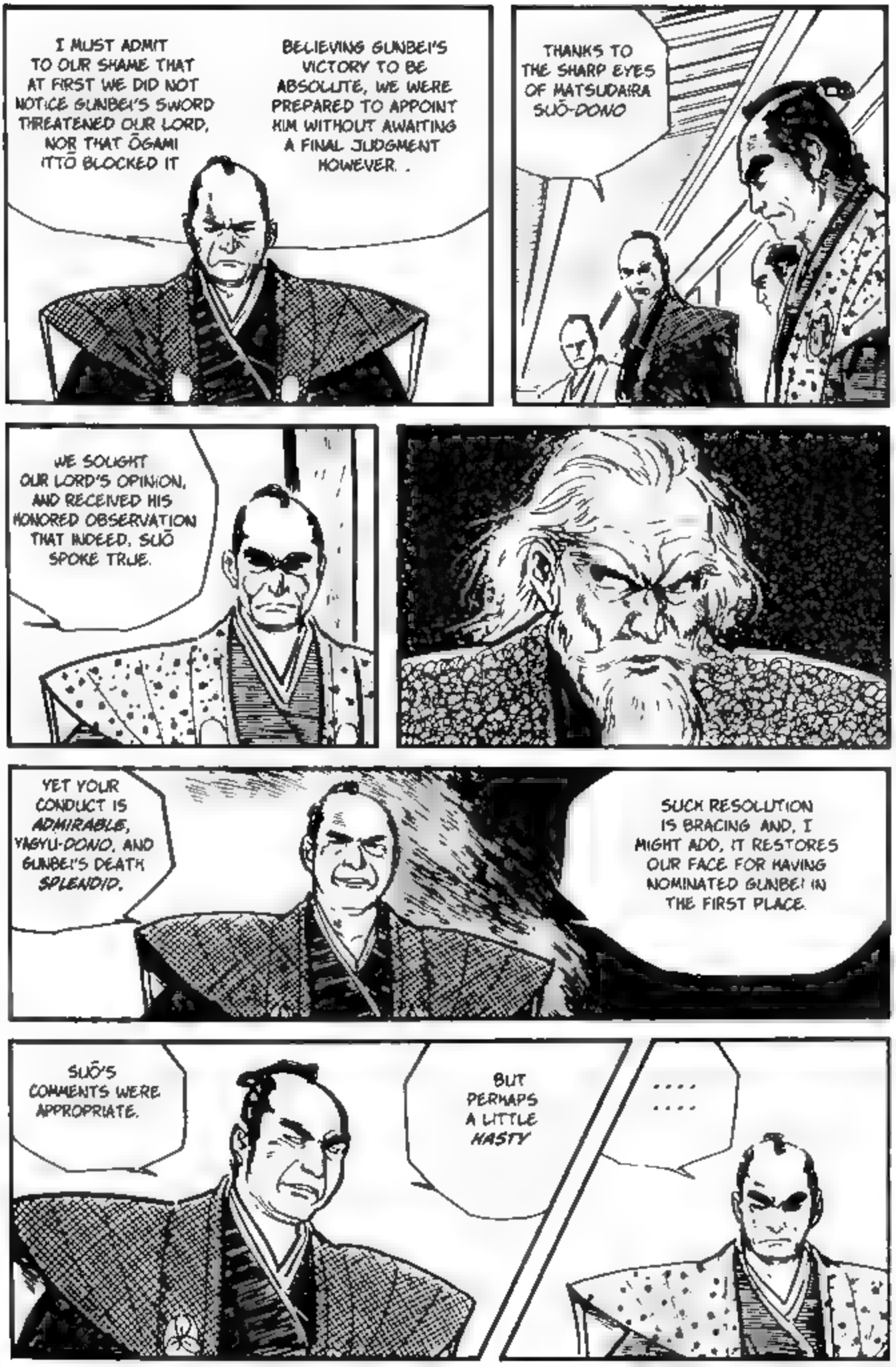
PLEASE INFORM OUR LORD THE SHŌGUN OF WHAT WE HAVE DONE TO MAKE AMENDS.

W... WELL DONE, YAGYŪ.

IT SHALL BE DONE.

AND NOW!


REGARDING THE SELECTION OF KŌGI KAI-SHAKUNIN...
I HUMBLY WISH TO KNOW THE REASON FOR ŌGAMI ITTŌ-DONO'S APPOINTMENT
I INTENDED TO INFORM YOU OF THIS PRIVATELY AND FURTHER, THAT IT WAS THE WILL OF OUR LORD THAT GUNBEI BE PLACED UNDER HOUSE ARREST
JUST AS I THOUGHT
YET IF YOU WISH TO HEAR DIRECTLY, I SHALL SPEAK
IT IS AS YOU HAVE SAID. DURING THE DUEL, THE TIP OF GUNBEI'S SWORD POINTED AT THE SHŌGUN. ŌGAMI ITTŌ SACRIFICED HIMSELF TO BLOCK IT
....
....


I MUST ADMIT TO OUR SHAME THAT AT FIRST WE DID NOT NOTICE GUNBEI'S SWORD THREATENED OUR LORD, NOR THAT ŌGAMI ITTŌ BLOCKED IT
BELIEVING GUNBEI'S VICTORY TO BE ABSOLUTE, WE WERE PREPARED TO APPOINT HIM WITHOUT AWAITING A FINAL JUDGMENT HOWEVER. .
THANKS TO THE SHARP EYES OF MATSUDAIRA SUŌ-DONO
WE SOUGHT OUR LORD'S OPINION, AND RECEIVED HIS HONORED OBSERVATION THAT INDEED, SUŌ SPOKE TRUE.
YET YOUR CONDUCT IS *ADMIRABLE*, YAGYU-DONO, AND GUNBEI'S DEATH *SPLENDID*.
SUCH RESOLUTION IS BRACING AND, I MIGHT ADD, IT RESTORES OUR FACE FOR HAVING NOMINATED GUNBEI IN THE FIRST PLACE.
SUŌ'S COMMENTS WERE APPROPRIATE.
BUT PERHAPS A LITTLE *HASTY*
. . . .
. . . .

INDEED, GUNBEI HAS NOW DEMONSTRATED HIS LOYALTY TO OUR LORD IN DEATH. AND OF COURSE, TECHNICALLY, HE ALSO WON THE DUEL.
SO WHILE IT IS TRUE HIS SWORD POINTED TOWARD OUR LORD, AND ŌGAMI ITTŌ STOOD IN ITS PATH, PERHAPS THERE WAS NO *DIRECT* CONNECTION...
HEAR, HEAR!
TRUE INDEED..
NO, MY LORDS... NOW THAT ŌGAMI ITTŌ IS *KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN*, WE *YAGYŪ* SHALL LET BYGONES BY BYGONES.
...AND SUPPORT HIM WITH ALL OUR HEART
I THANK YOU FOR THESE WORDS.

YET...I HAVE ONE MORE REQUEST OF THE GO-RŌJŪ-SAMA.
NOT ONLY THE POST OF KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN, BUT ALSO THE REPUTATIONS OF SUIŌ-RYŪ AND THE YAGYŪ SHININ-RYŪ HUNG ON THIS RECENT DUEL. GUNBEI'S IRRESPONSIBILITY FORCED ŌGAMI-DONO TO STOP THE FIGHT BEFORE THAT COULD BE DECIDED.
IT SEEMS THE GO-RŌJŪ-SAMA THEMSELVES DISAGREE, SOME SUGGESTING PERHAPS GUNBEI WON.
AND THUS, I REQUEST ANOTHER DUEL. I HUMBLY ASK THAT YOU INFORM OUR LORD THE SHŌGUN OF THIS AS WELL.
I WILL TELL OUR LORD. AND YET...
...THE APPOINTMENT IS FINAL.
INDEED! THE YAGYŪ REQUEST A DUEL WITH ŌGAMI-DONO AS THE HONORABLE KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN.
BY DEFEATING US, ŌGAMI-DONO BECOMES GO-KAISHAKUNIN IN DEED AS WELL AS NAME!

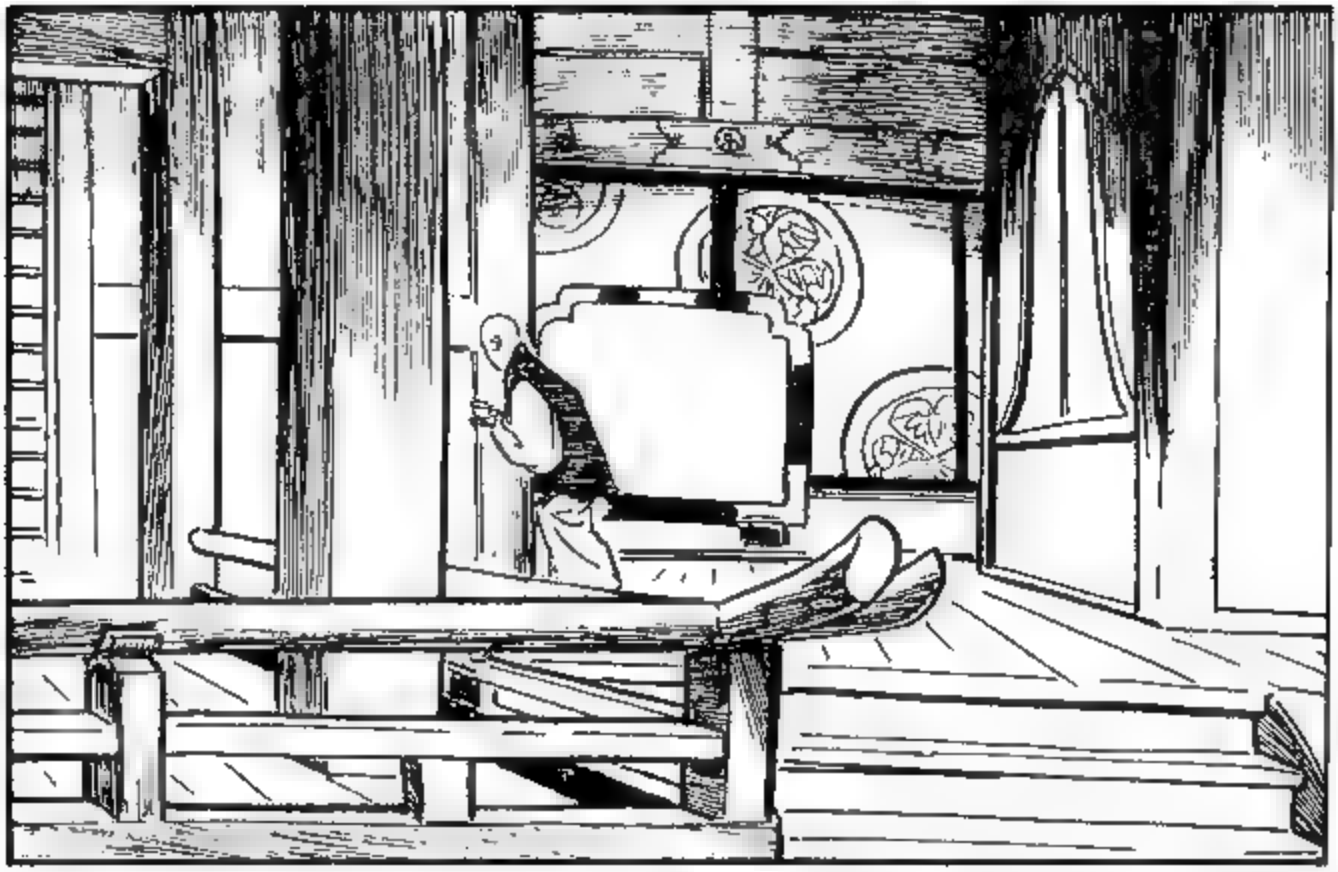
YET EVEN SHOULD HE LOSE, HE IS STILL *GO-KAISHAKUNIN*, OF COURSE

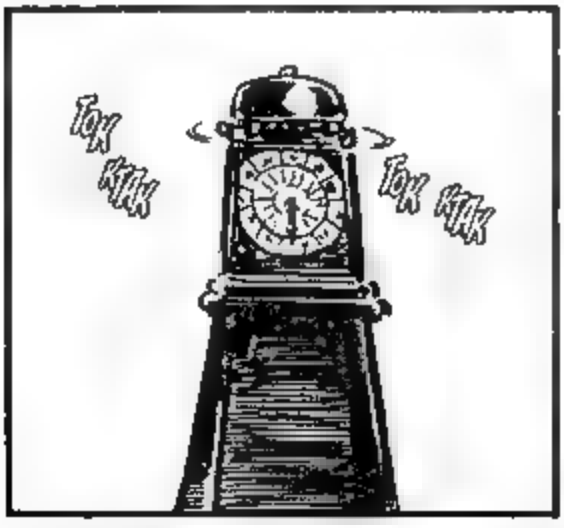
WHAT SAY YOU, *ŌGAMI-DONO*?!

IF OUR LORD THE *SHŌGUN* PERMITS, IT IS MY GREATEST DESIRE.

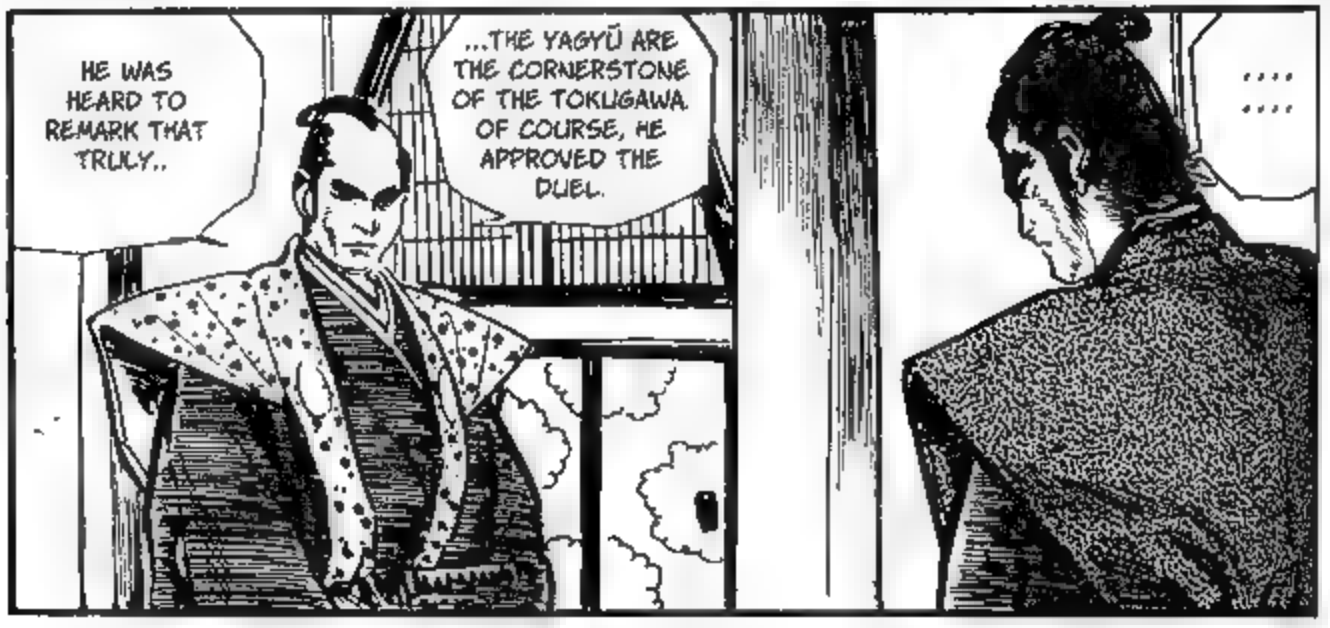
WITH WHOM SHALL I FIGHT ?

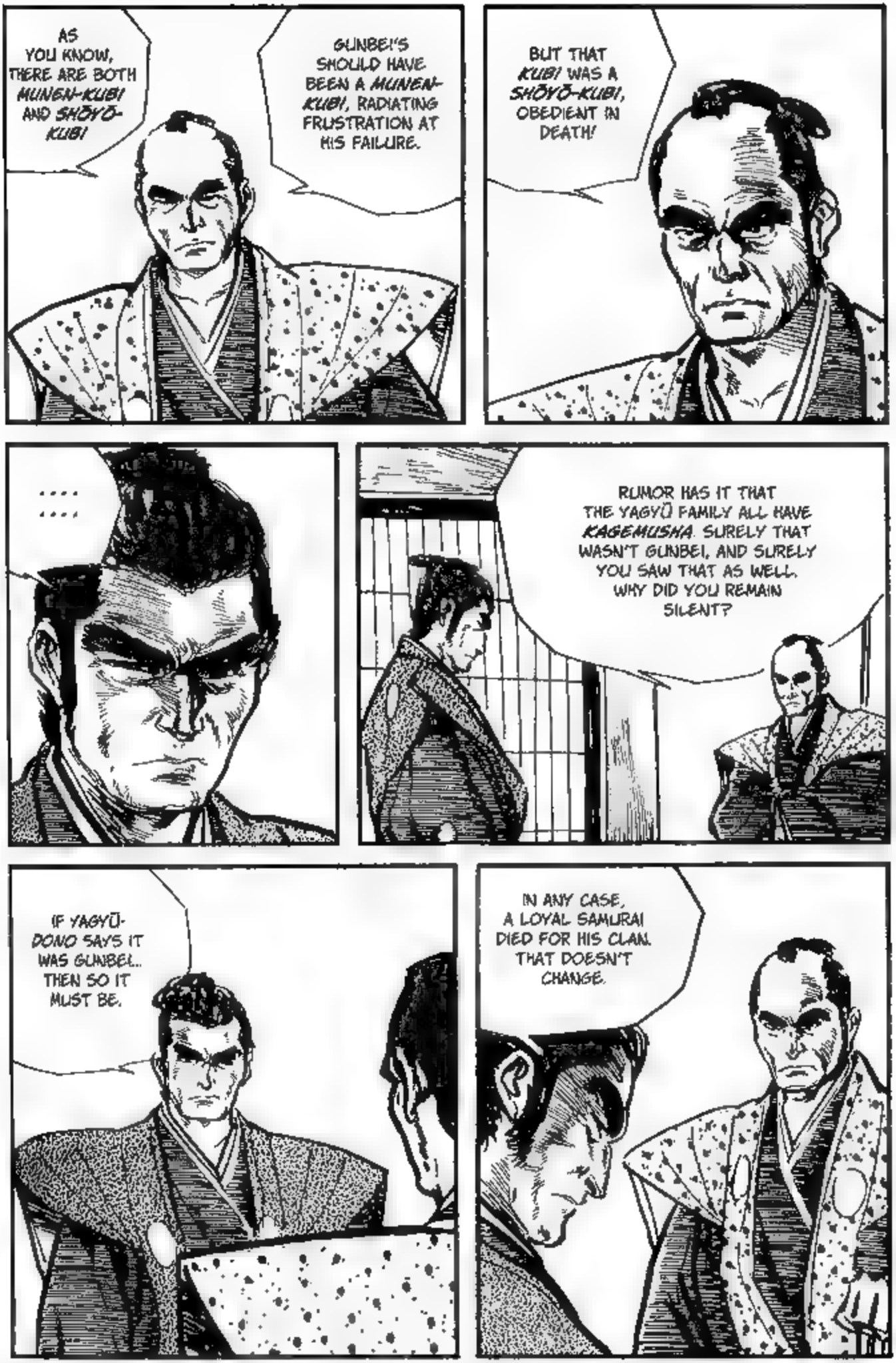
OLD THOUGH THESE BONES MAY BE, I, *YAGYŪ RETSUDŌ*, SHALL FACE YOU!




TOK
KIK
TOK
KIK

OUR LORD THE SHŌGUN WAS DEEPLY PAINED BY GUNBEI'S DEATH.


HE WAS HEARD TO REMARK THAT TRULY..
...THE YAGYŪ ARE THE CORNERSTONE OF THE TOKUGAWA. OF COURSE, HE APPROVED THE DUEL.
.....
.....

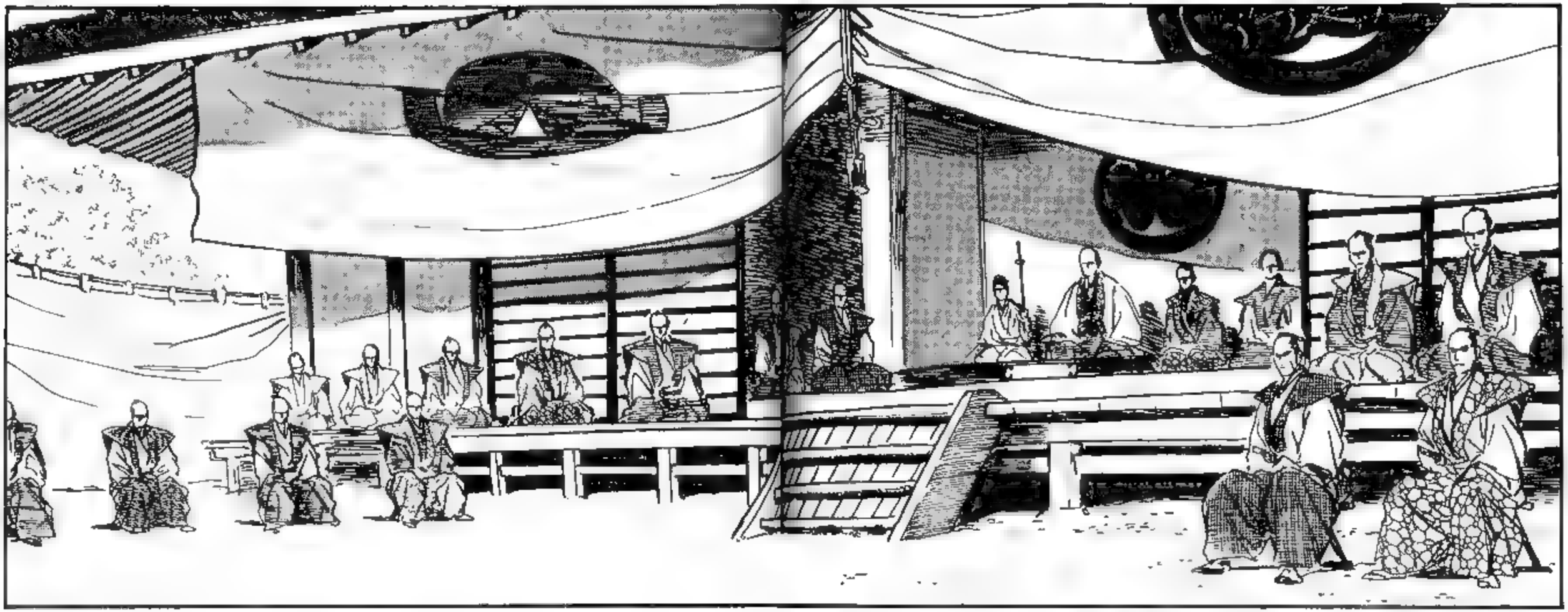

AS YOU KNOW, THERE ARE BOTH *MUNEN-KUBI* AND *SHŌYŌ-KUBI*
GUNBEI'S SHOULD HAVE BEEN A *MUNEN-KUBI*, RADIATING FRUSTRATION AT HIS FAILURE.
BUT THAT *KUBI* WAS A *SHŌYŌ-KUBI*, OBEDIENT IN DEATH!
. . . .
. . . .
RUMOR HAS IT THAT THE YAGYŪ FAMILY ALL HAVE *KAGEMUSHA*. SURELY THAT WASN'T GUNBEI, AND SURELY YOU SAW THAT AS WELL. WHY DID YOU REMAIN SILENT?
IF YAGYŪ-*DONO* SAYS IT WAS GUNBEI... THEN SO IT MUST BE.
IN ANY CASE, A LOYAL SAMURAI DIED FOR HIS CLAN. THAT DOESN'T CHANGE.

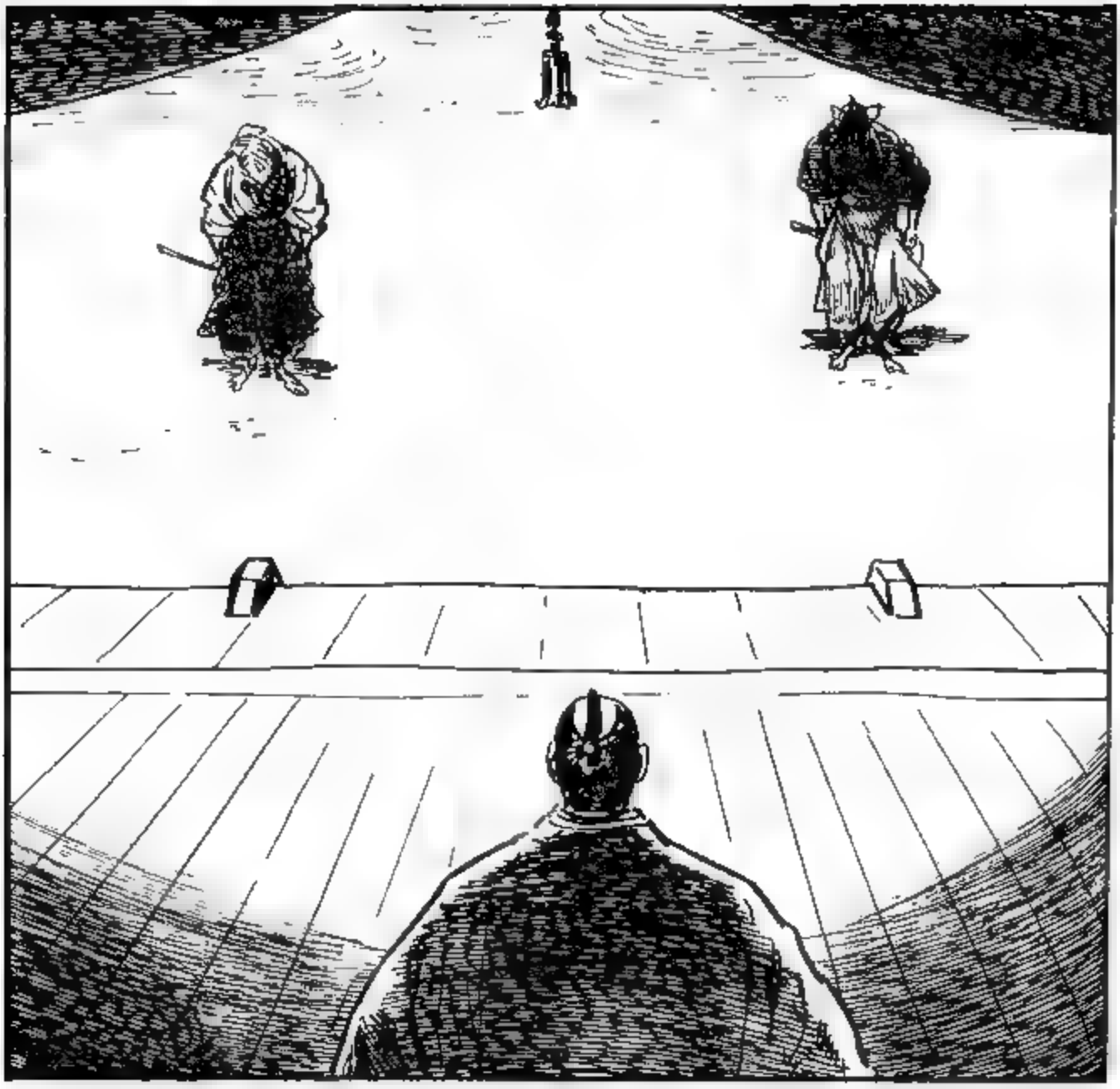
AS ALWAYS, YOU ARE TRUE TO THE SOUL OF SHIDŌ
THE TOKUGAWA NEED MORE LIKE YOU.
INSTEAD, THEY HAVE YAGYŪ RETSUDŌ, SCHEMING FOR POWER. ALREADY HE HAS THE RŌJŪ AND THE SHŌGUN HIMSELF IN THE PALM OF HIS HAND. WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT HE COULD TURN THIS HUMILIATING DISASTER TO HIS ADVANTAGE..?
SO, THERE IS NO DOUBT RETSUDŌ WILL LET YOU WIN TOMORROW'S DUEL.
?! WHY, MY LORD?!
THEY'LL SACRIFICE ANYTHING TO FURTHER THE CLAN— EVEN THEIR REPUTATION! THAT'S WHY THEY'RE SO DANGEROUS!
RETSUDŌ LOSES, YOUR CLAIM TO THE POST IS FIRMLY ESTABLISHED. RETSUDŌ SHOWS HE MEANS YOU NO ILL.
THEN IT BEGINS!
WHAT RUSE WILL THEY USE TO BRING YOU DOWN...? WHO CAN KNOW?
BUT NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THEM! NEVER RELAX YOUR GUARD!
BUT WHY IS YAGYŪ-DONO SO—

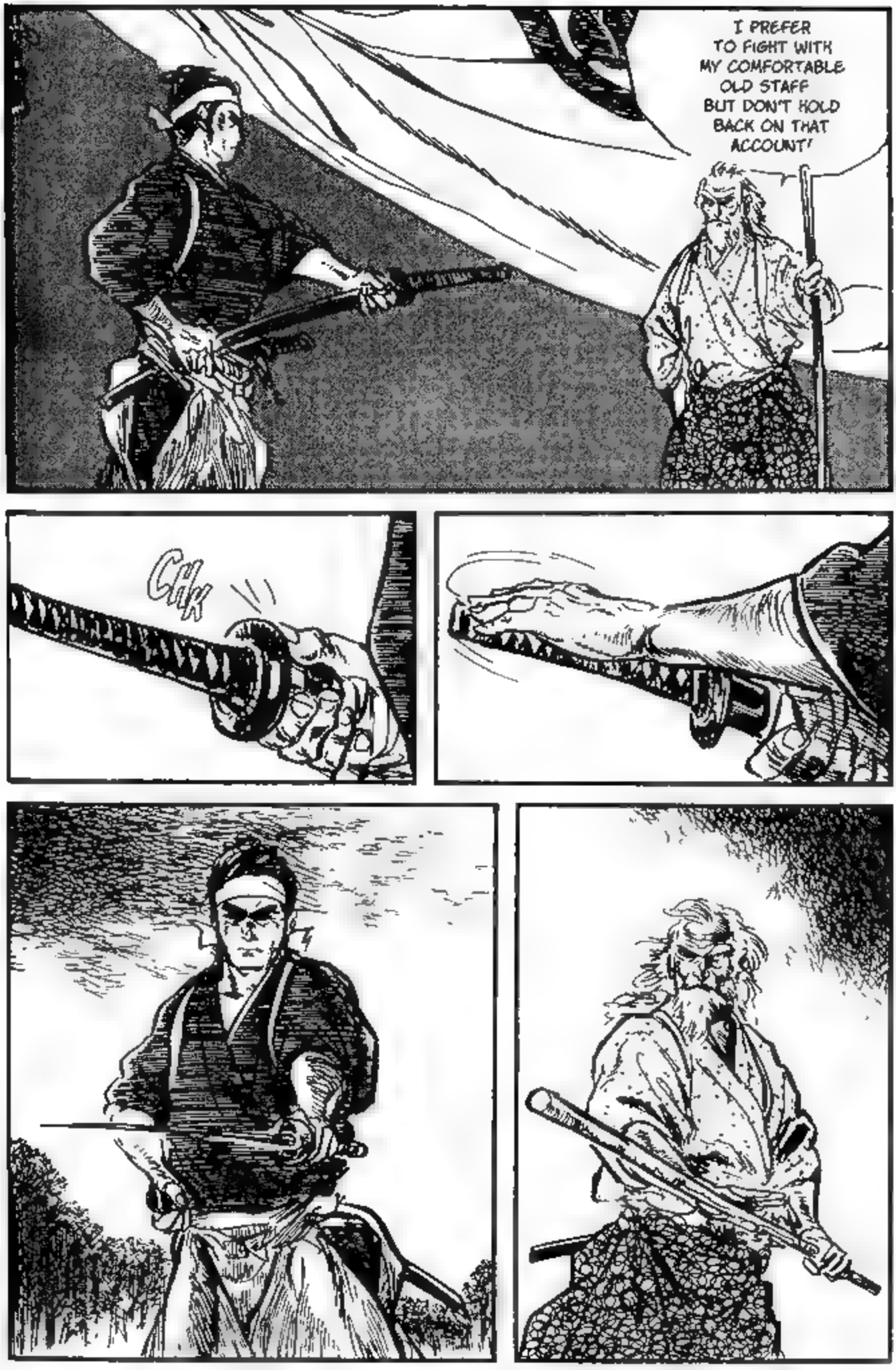
HE WANTS YOUR POST! AT ANY COST!
BUT.. WHY?!
I'M INVESTIGATING CERTAIN MATTERS.
RIGHT NOW, IT'S SPECULATION. I CAN'T SPEAK OF IT, NOT EVEN ABOUT THE YAGYU.
YOU'LL HEAR SOON ENOUGH.
AND IT WILL SHAKE THE SHŌGUNATE AND ALL THE HAN TO THEIR VERY ROOTS!

MATSUDAIRA SUŌ-NO-KAMI, YOU IMPUDENT PUP! YOU'RE AN IRRITATING THORN IN MY SIDE!

IF YOU SHOULD HAVE AN ACCIDENT..
..NOTHING WOULD STOP US FROM CONTROLLING THE BAKUFU!
KNOW THAT TOMORROW'S DUEL IS FOR YOU ALONE!
HEH HEH HEH ....
FIRST I STRIKE YOU DOWN, THEN, LATER ŌGAMI ITTŌ. THE YAGYU WILL BE KŌGA KAISHAKUNIN!
MY PLANS ARE LAID






I PREFER TO FIGHT WITH MY COMFORTABLE OLD STAFF BUT DON'T HOLD BACK ON THAT ACCOUNT!
CHK

SKSSH

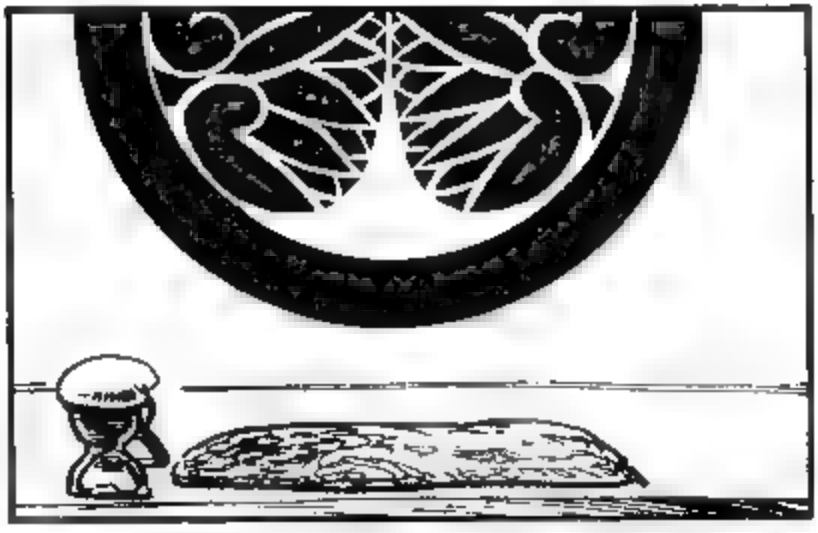
SHANNGG
KRAK

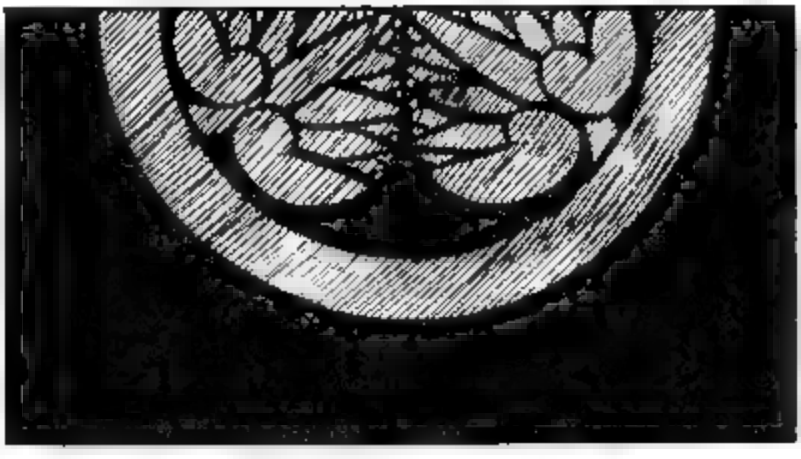
PIP
AN IRON
CORE!
WHISSH
WHTTT
FWHSH

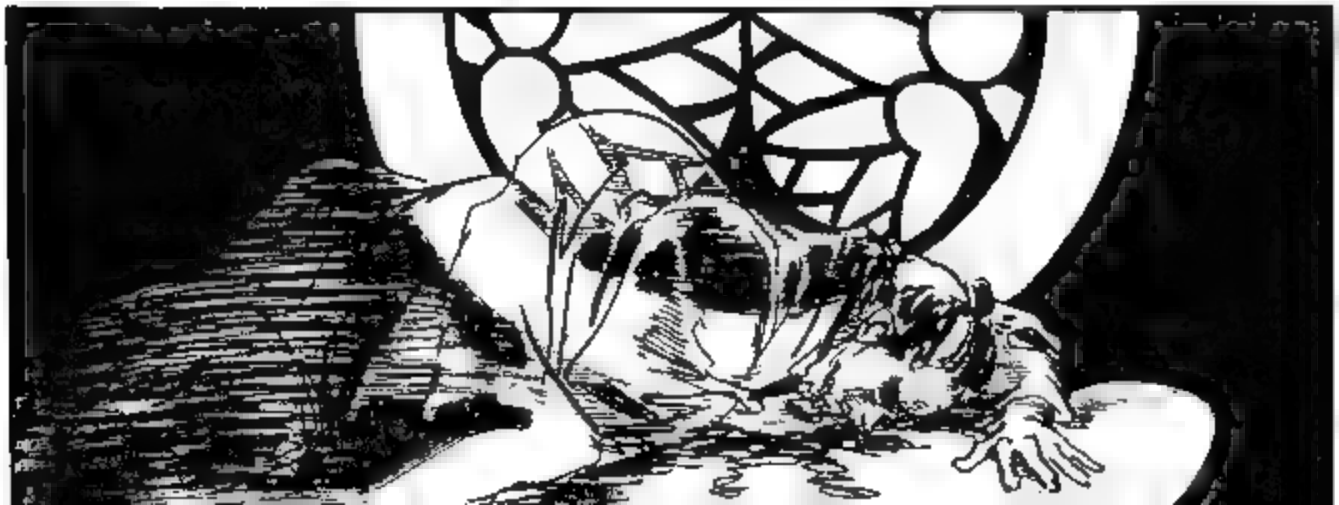
WHSH
KSHNNGG
WHRAKK

KUKK!!
S-SUŌ-DONO!
FORGIVE ME MY LORD!
N-NO. IT. IT'S NOTHING
DIDN'T BLOCK IT MY FAILURE.
IT'S A WARRIOR'S SHAME... TO INTERRUPT A DUEL
A..A PATHETIC S-SIGHT INDEED

IT IS I WHO MUST APOLOGIZE.
:KOFF:
HE'S INCRED-IBLE.
RETSUDŌ USED MY STROKE TO STRIKE DOWN SUŌ-DONO!
I AM DISPLEASED, SUŌ!
CAN YOU NOT EVEN DEFLECT AN OLD MAN'S CANE?!
M-MY LORD!
I. I HAVE NO EXCUSE!
YOU WERE SUPERB, ITTŌ!
YAGYŪ! YOU'RE GETTING OLD!





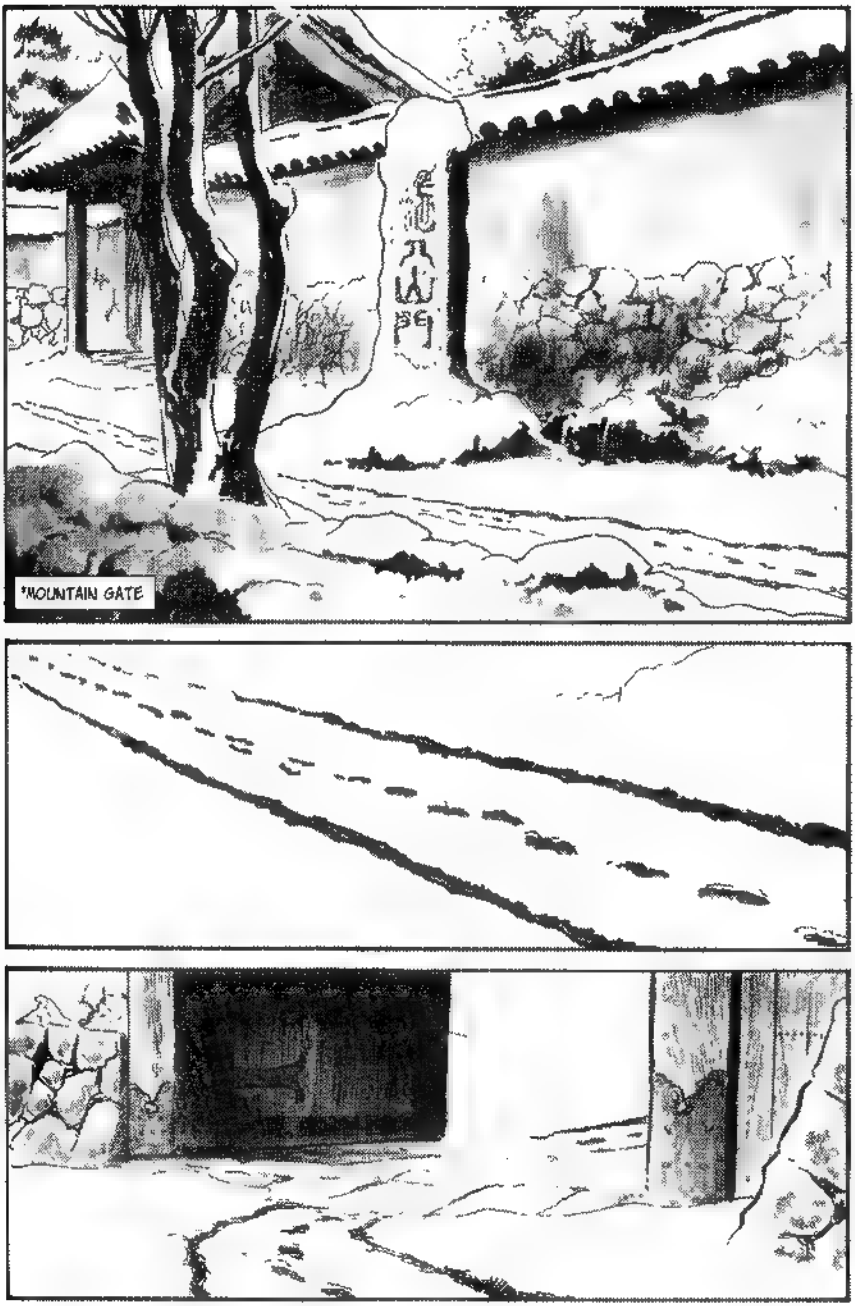


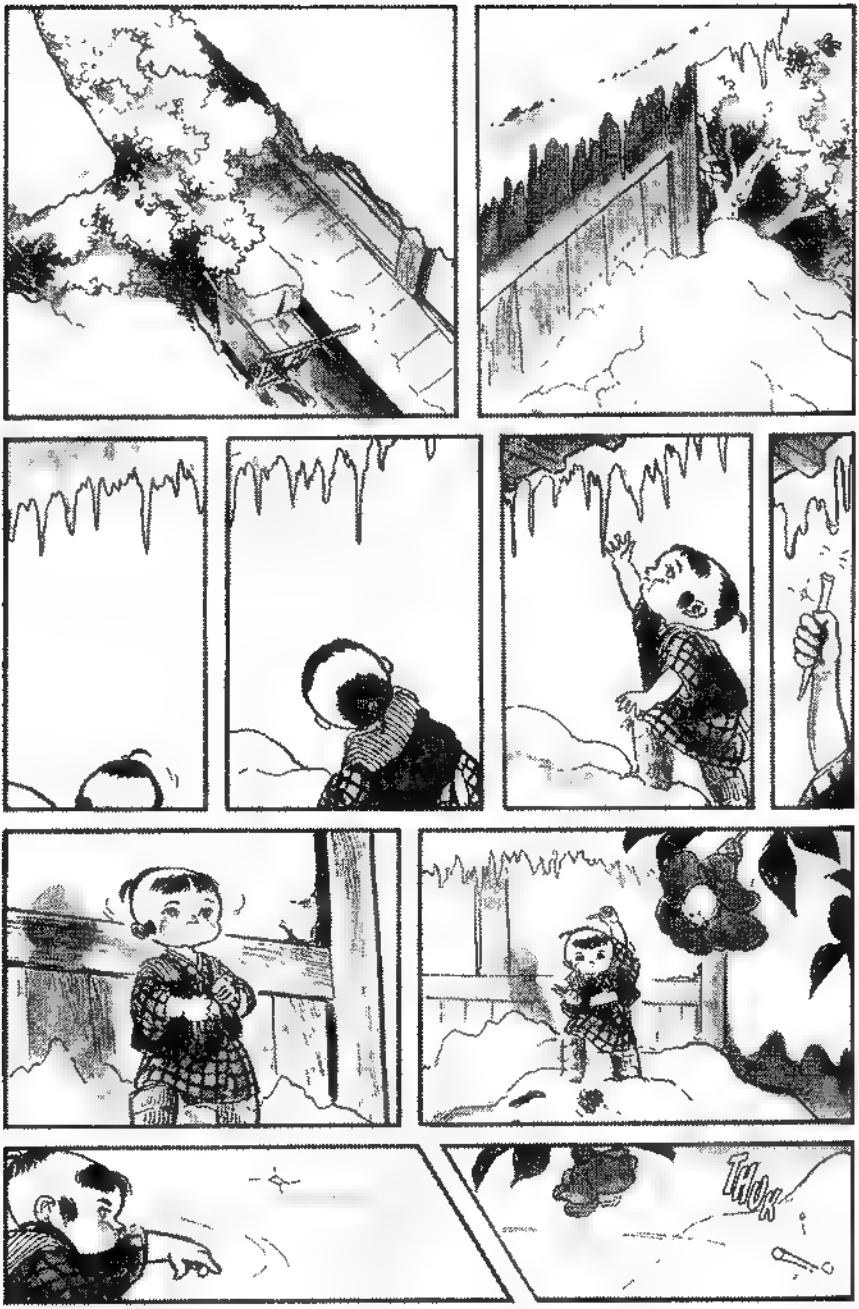
WHY WERE THEY SO DESPERATE TO BE RID OF KAISHAKUNIN?
ONLY WHEN I FIND THE ANSWER CAN WE LEAVE THESE ENDLESS SIX PATHS BEHIND, AND FIND AN END TO OUR QUEST

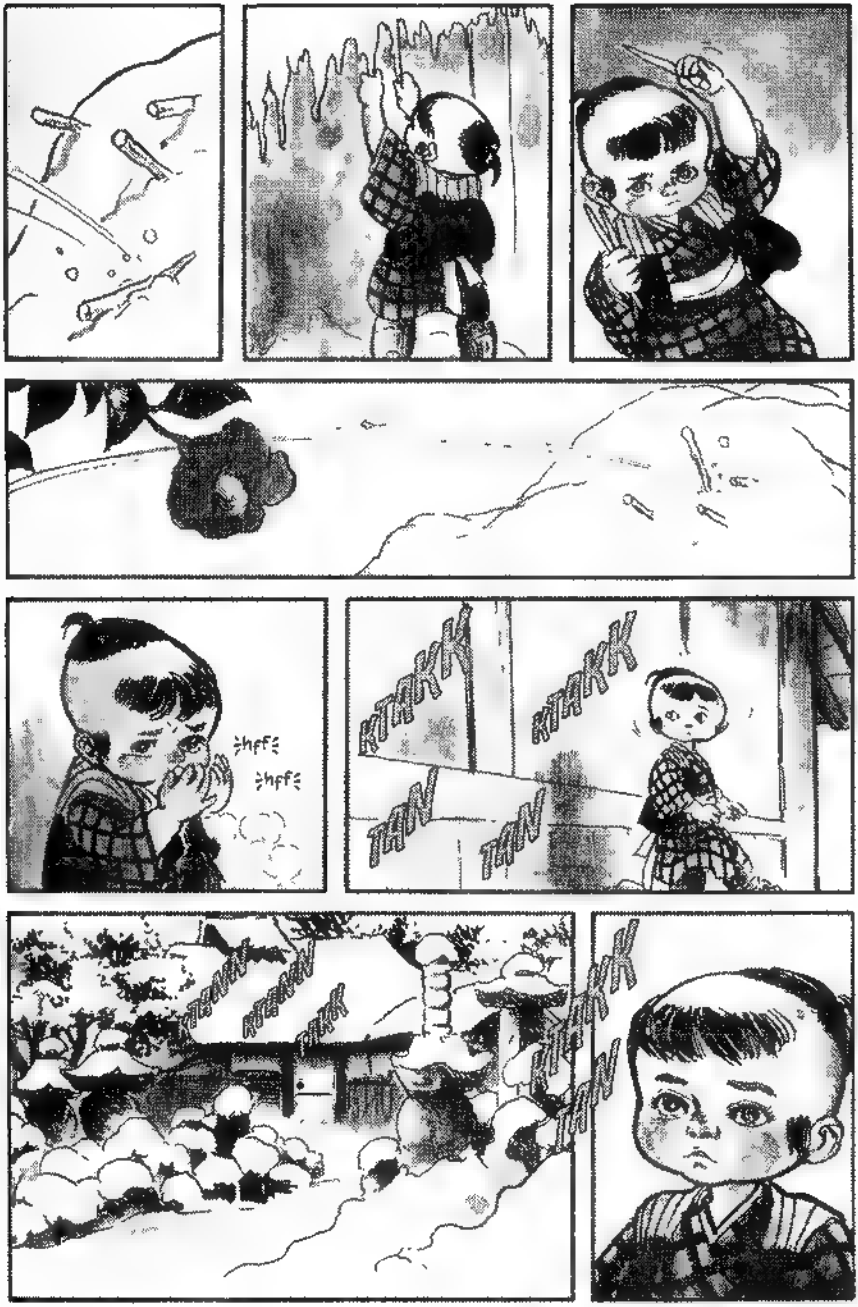
SO DOKO

the forty-third

Thread of Tears


*MOUNTAIN GATE


THUK


hff
hff
KTAKK
KTAKK
THN
THN
KTAKK
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TAKK
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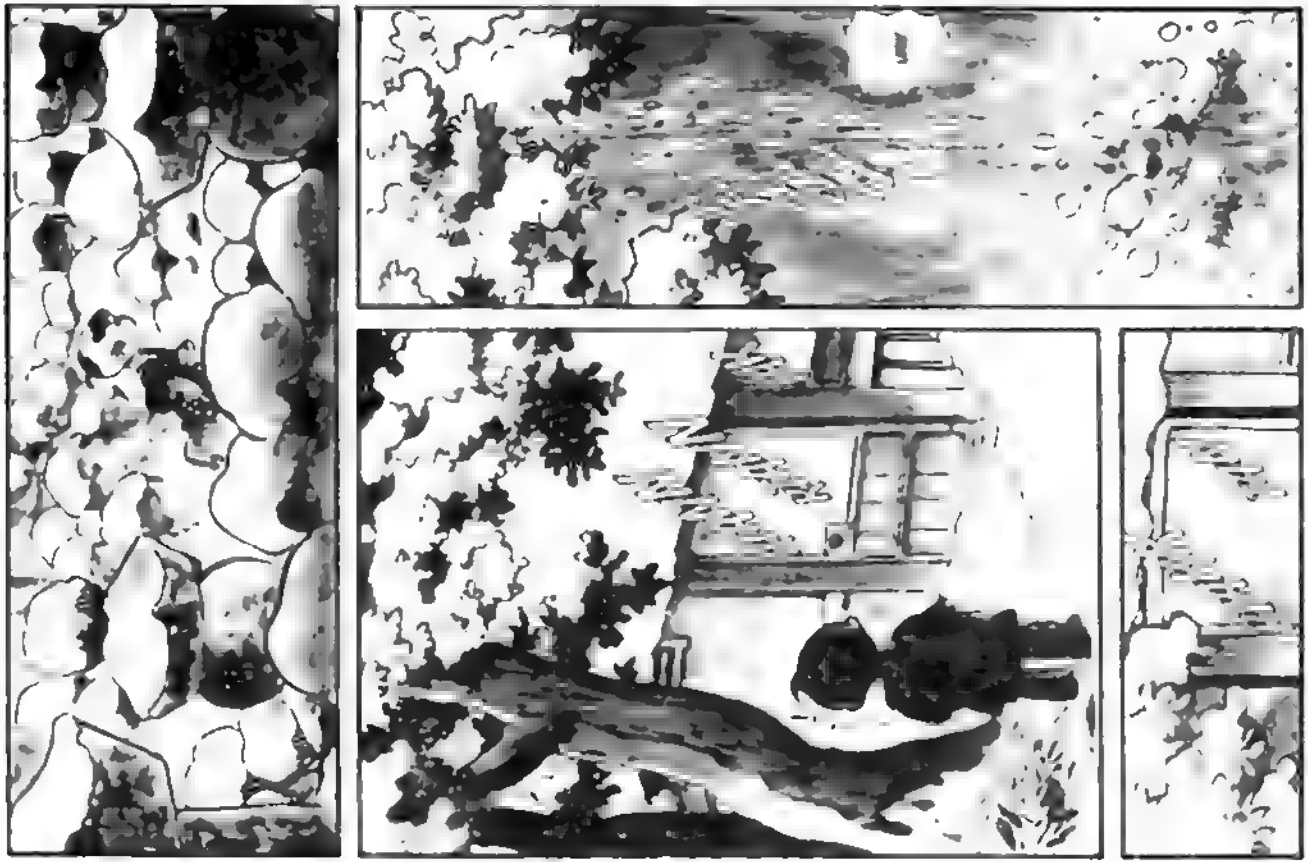
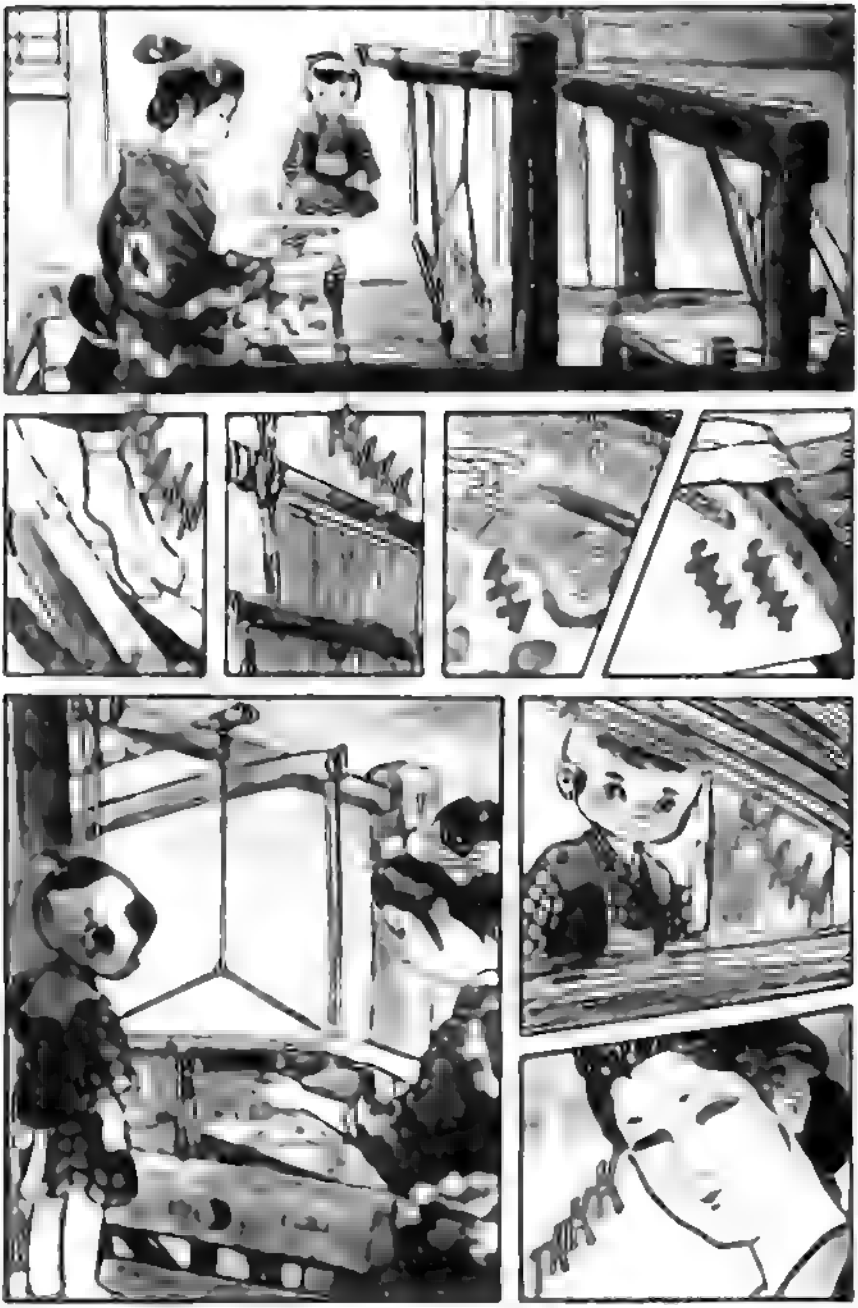
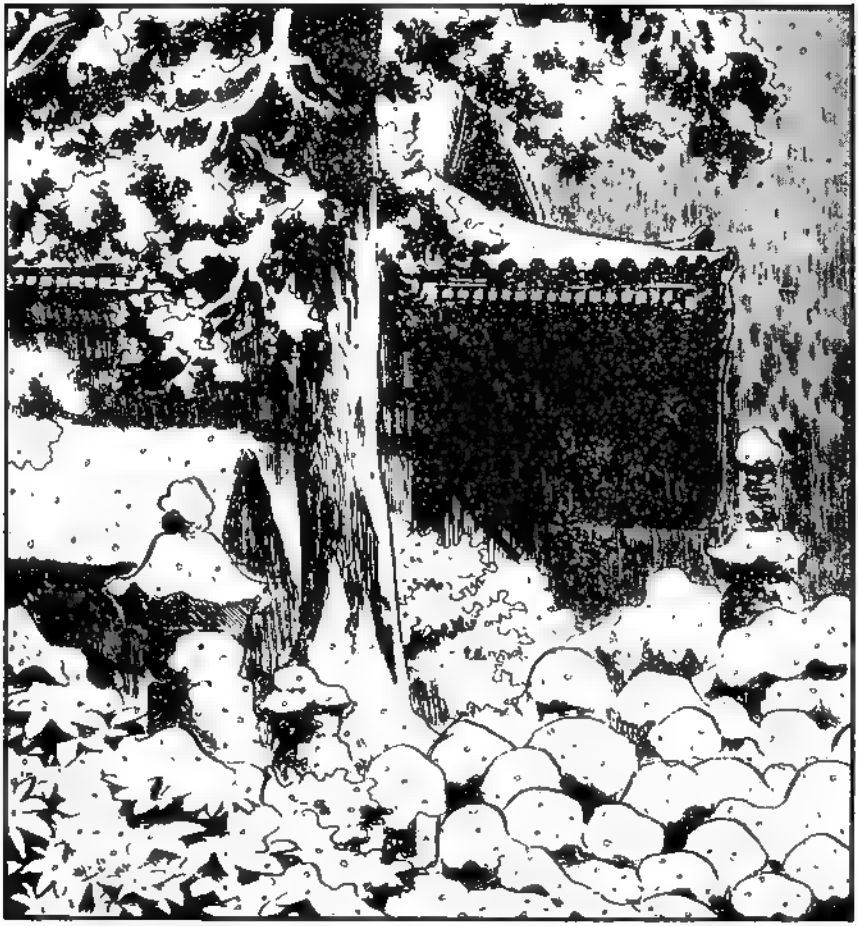
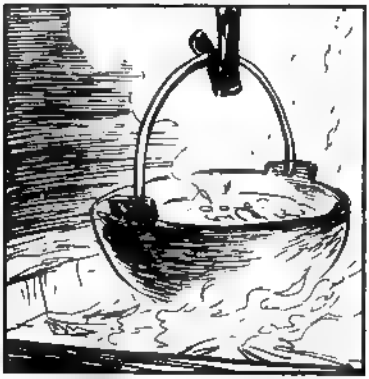
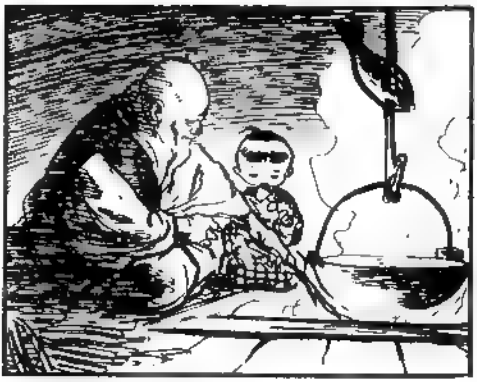
THN

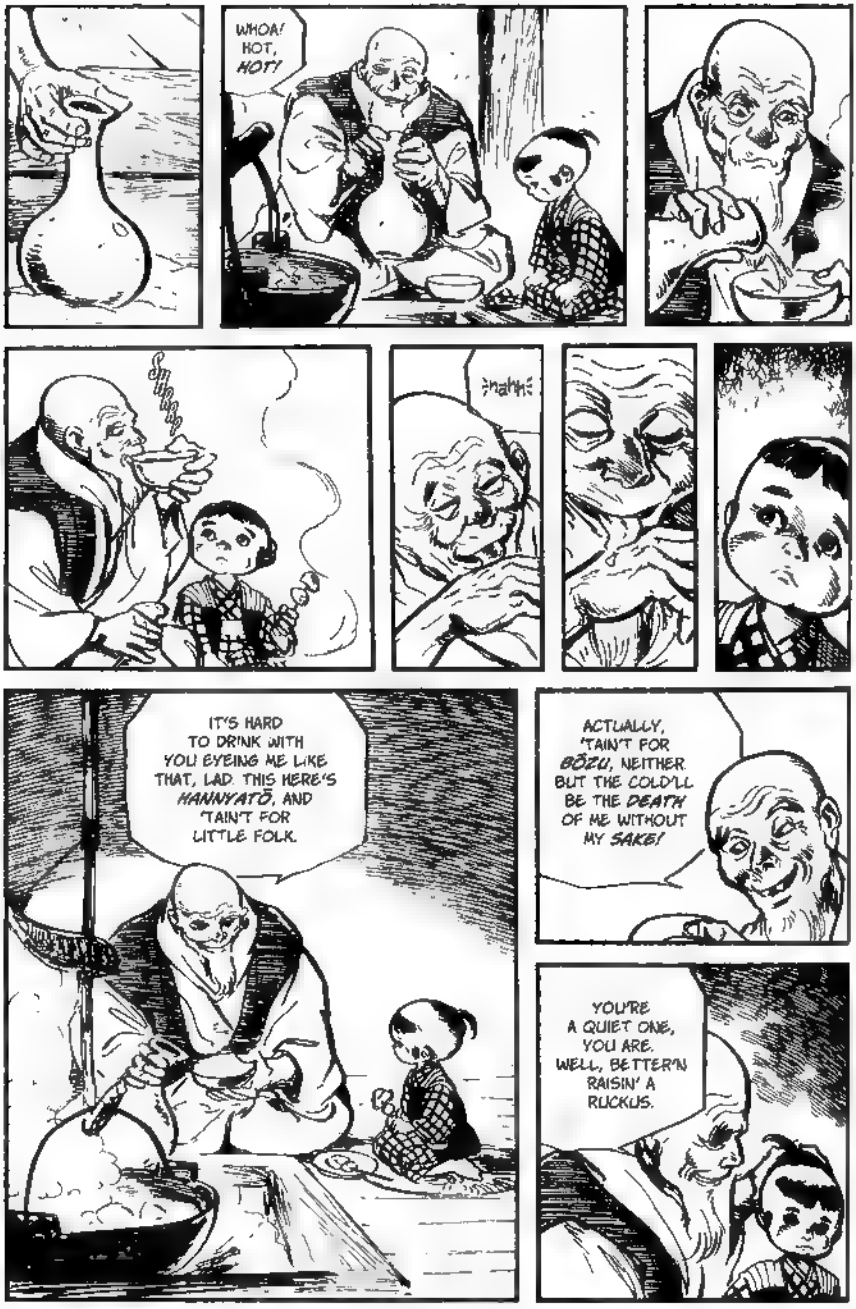






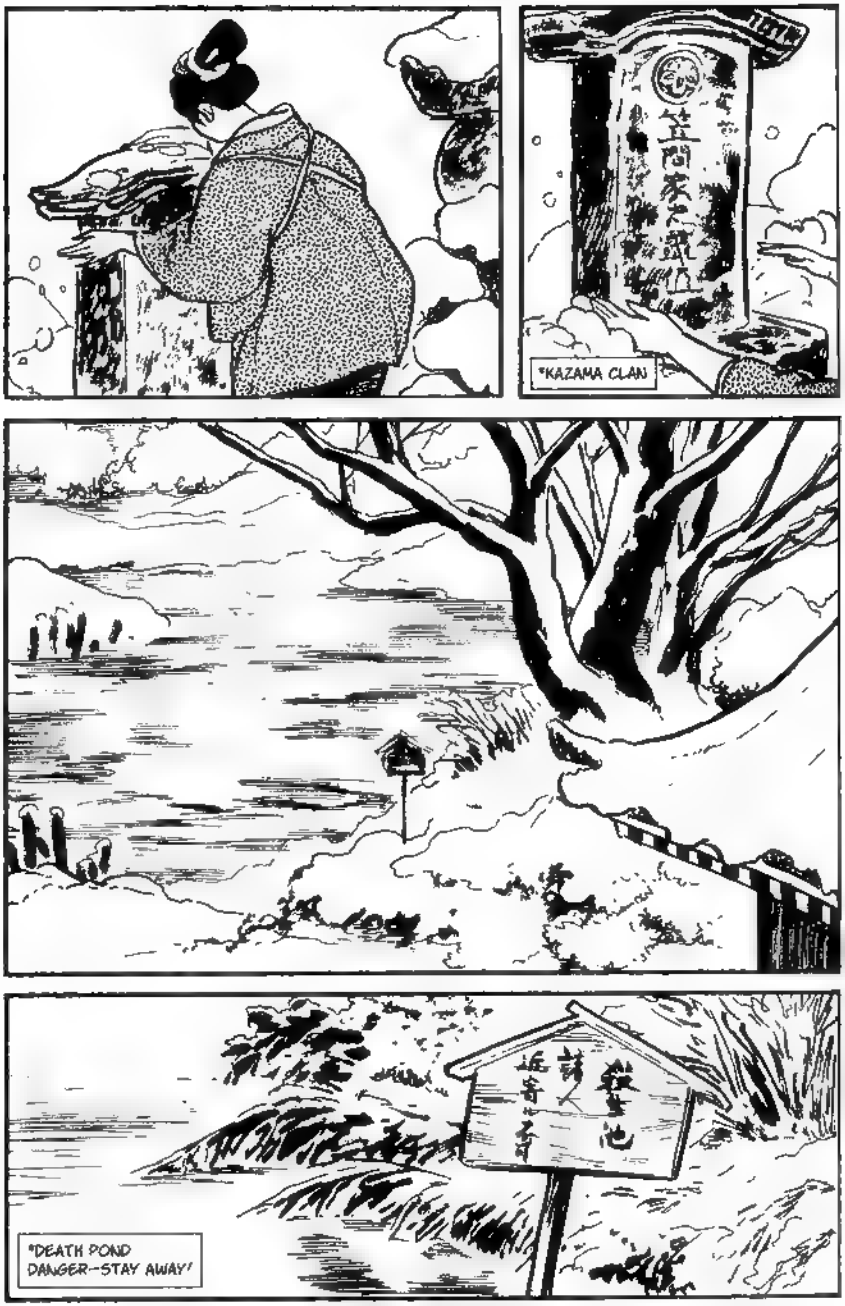





WHOA! HOT, HOT!
Shhhh
ahahh
IT'S HARD TO DRINK WITH YOU EYEING ME LIKE THAT, LAD. THIS HERE'S HANNYATŌ, AND 'TAIN'T FOR LITTLE FOLK.
ACTUALLY, 'TAIN'T FOR BŌZU, NEITHER. BUT THE COLD'LL BE THE DEATH OF ME WITHOUT MY SAKE!
YOU'RE A QUIET ONE, YOU ARE. WELL, BETTER'N RAISIN' A RUCKUS.

YOUR PAPA DON'T QUIT, THOUGH. COLD ENOUGH TO FREEZE YER BONES.
BUT STILL HE PRAYS.

I WILL NEVER FORGET, MY LOVE... ....


*KAZAMA CLAN
*DEATH POND
DANGER--STAY AWAY!

HEAVE HO!
KRAK
SKRAK
KRAK
KRFF!
KRESH
SPLSSH
SPLSSH
THERE WE GO!
HAH! A HAIKU!
HE HOOKS WINTER CARP WITH THE PASTE OF POTATOES HUNGRY HERETIC!

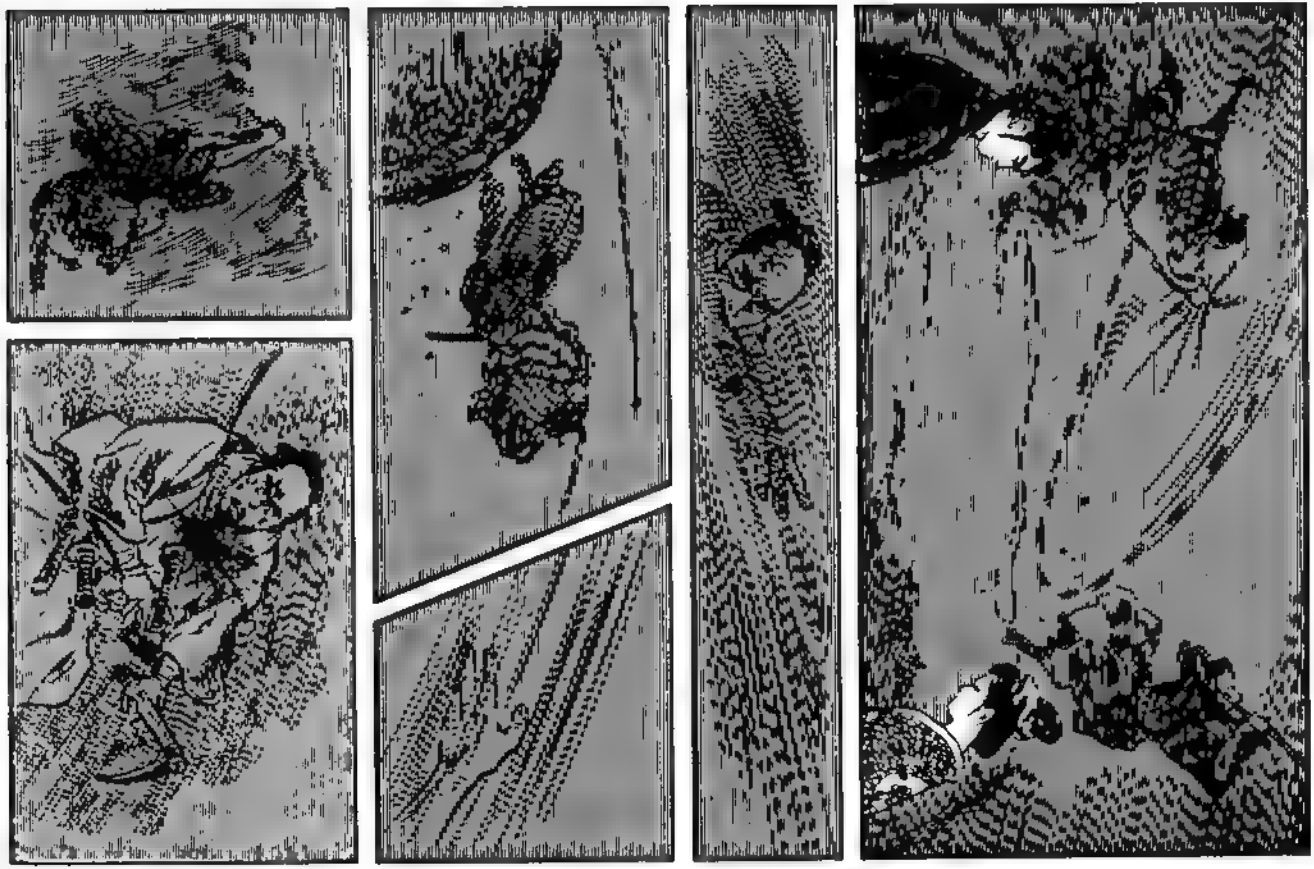
THERE'S GŌKAI, SEE? THE FIVE SINS A BŌZU CAN'T KILL, NOR STEAL. NO SEX, NO LIES. AND NO DRINKING
UNDERSTAND? IF I FISH, THAT'S KILLING. MY SAKE, THAT'S DRINKING. HERESIES!
THEY AIN'T BITING
LET'S WAKE 'EM UP
THERE!
SO. I'M JUST A BAD OLD BŌZU.
BUT KNOW WHAT? WHEN WINTER COMES, AND THE SNOW LAYS HEAVY NO VEGGIES, NO RICE, NO NOTHIN'!
THE OFFERINGS STOP, NO DONATIONS PRETTY SOON, T'AIN'T THE PATH OF HOLINESS- IT'S THE PATH OF STARVATION!
AND IF I CAN'T EVEN FEED YOU GOOD FOLK, WHY, I CAN'T JUST FOLLOW THE BUDDHA, NOW CAN I?
WHERE THERE'S HEAVEN, THERE'S HELL AFTER NIGHT, THE DAWN. SHINRIN BANSHO! ALL CREATION'S GOT ANOTHER SIDE!

THE DARK AND THE LIGHT BECOME ONE, HEAVEN ABOVE, EARTH BELOW, THE SIX PATHS, THE FOUR LIVES.
THERE'S TWO SIDES TO THE BUDDHA. HE'S HARD ON THEM GŌKAI, BUT HE'S ALSO GOT DAIJIHI, THE GREAT COMPASSION.
SO HERE WE GOT A POND, WITH FISH. LOTS, 'CAUSE PEOPLE DON'T CATCH 'EM HERE!
IN OTHER WORDS, THE COMPASSIONATE BUDDHA! EH HEH HEH!
A BITE!
HOH! IT'S A BIG 'UN!
SWA HA HA HA!

BEHOLD! THE COMPASSION OF BUDDHA!
KAW, KAW!!
OH, THAT'S RIGHT! YOU'RE NOT INTRODUCED
KAZAMA ICHIZU.
SHE'S A WIDOW, SIR. HER HUSBAND WAS A HANSHI, BUT HE DIED TRAGICALLY, AND SHE'S BEEN HERE EVER SINCE, TENDING HIS GRAVE.
HER RELATIVES HAVE ALL PASSED, SO I KEEP URGIN' HER TO MOVE TO ANOTHER HAN, FIND A NEW HUSBAND, NEW HAPPINESS BUT SHE'S A WOMAN OF PRINCIPLE, SHE IS. WON'T BUDGE.
WHICH REMINDS ME.
I DON'T KNOW YOUR NAME, GOOD SIR.
ŌGAMI ITTŌ.

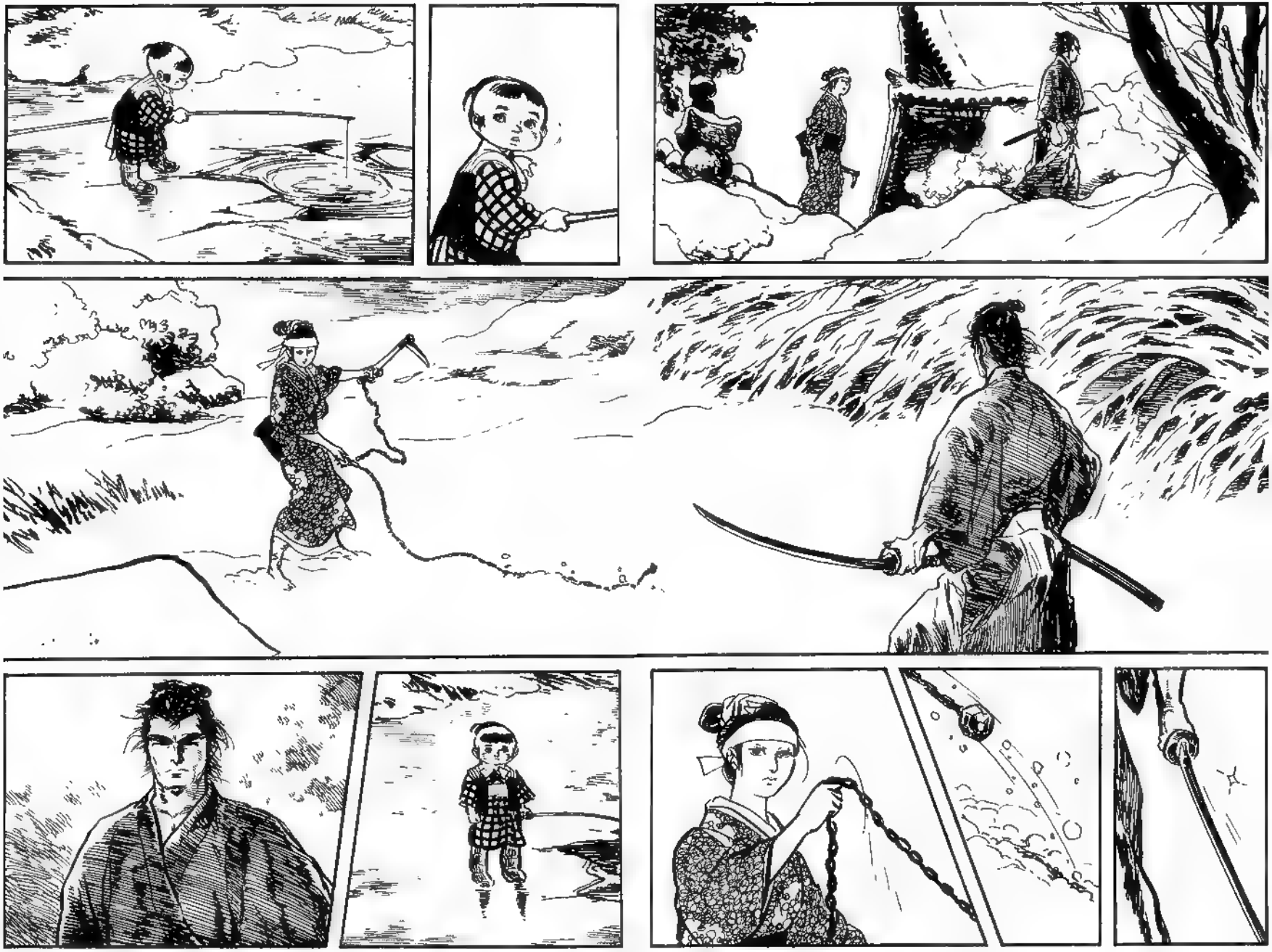
MAY I OFFER YOU SOME TEA .?
HOH! THERE'S AN IDEA!
I'LL JUST SLICE THIS UP
NOTHING LIKE HOT TEA BEFORE BREAKFAST!
KLANG
YOU WORK THE LOOM?
I DO. WEAVING THE TEARS OF THE DAYS AND MONTHS I HAVE ENDURED, WAITING.
EVERY DAY, I WEAVE...

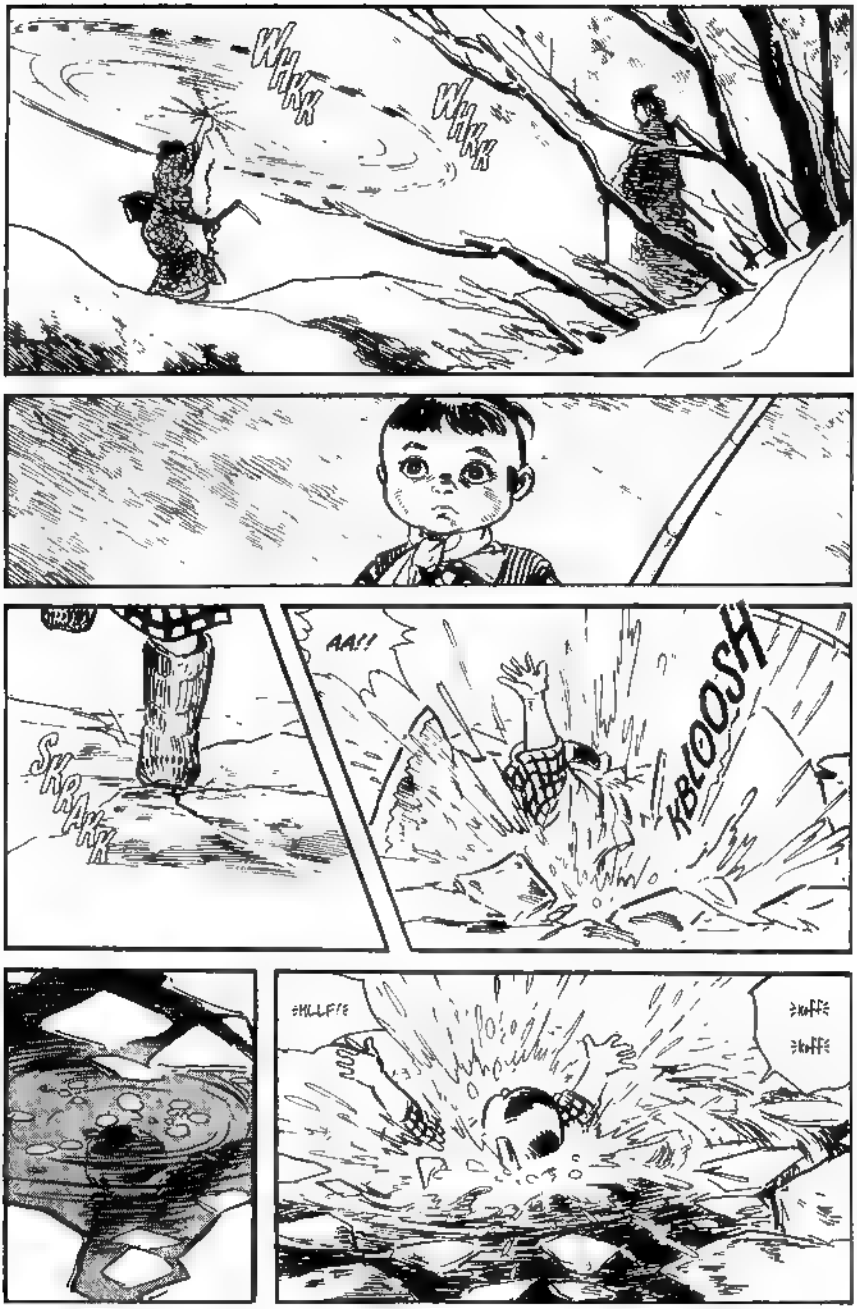
WEAVE, THEN UNRAVEL...
..AND WEAVE AGAIN. UNTIL TODAY
LAST NIGHT, WHEN YOU ARRIVED, IT WAS FINALLY FINISHED ..
THE TEARS OF MY QUEST, WHOLE CLOTH AT LAST
. . . .
. . . .
MY HUSBAND WAS KASAMA DAISUKE, KILLED BY YOUR SWORD.
. . . .
. . . !



I LEARNED THAT HIS KILLER WAS THE FORMER KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN, ŌGAMI ITTŌ, AND THAT NOW HE WALKS THE ASSASSIN'S ROAD, WITH HIS SON.
. . . .
. . . .
THIS IS OUR FAMILY TEMPLE. I THOUGHT IF ŌGAMI-DONO WAS, AS I HAD HEARD, A TRUE BUSHI..

. .THEN WHEN HE PASSED THIS WAY AGAIN, HE WOULD SURELY COME *HERE*, AND PRAY FOR MY HUSBAND'S SALVATION.
AND SO .I WAITED
I WAS RESOLVED TO WAIT FOREVER, THOUGH MY TEARS RAN DRY, THOUGH AGE TAKE ME AND THE CLOTH OF MY QUEST BE WOVEN WITH HAIRS OF WHITE...
. . . . .
. . . . .
PLEASE. . GRANT ME A DUEL.
. . . . .
DONE!




WHKK
WHKK
SKRAKK
AA!!
KBLOOSH

SPLSH
SPRSH
...?
OH, NO!

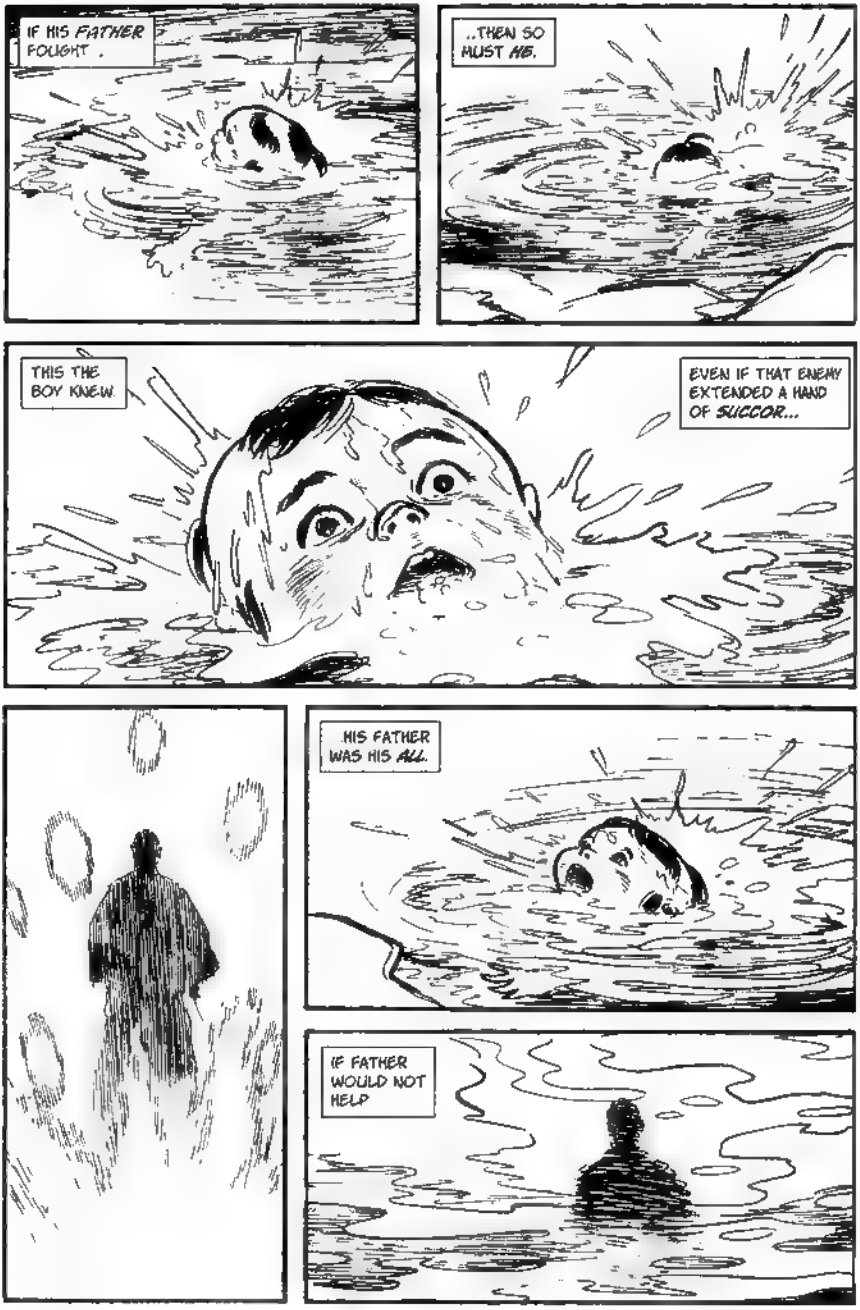
SPLSH
PUSH
HFF!
AHH!
KOFF
OH?
...!
AH..
..?
KOFF
AAAH!

ŌGAMI-DONO ...?
Y-YOUR SON!! YOU WON'T HELP HIM?!
I AM FATHER BUT NOT FATHER. HE IS SON BUT NOT SON.
WHEREVER WE GO IS A BATTLE-FIELD WE FOLLOW BYAKUDŌ, THE WHITE WAY OF OUR QUEST, TRUSTING IN OUR HEARTS THAT THERE IS LIFE IN DEATH.
THUS WE ACCEPT ALL THAT IS TO COME, ALL CHANCE, ALL FORTUNE!
FOR YOU TOO, THERE SHOULD ONLY BE THE ROAD OF YOUR QUEST! DO NOT WORRY FOR HIM.
NOW . . . ATTACK!

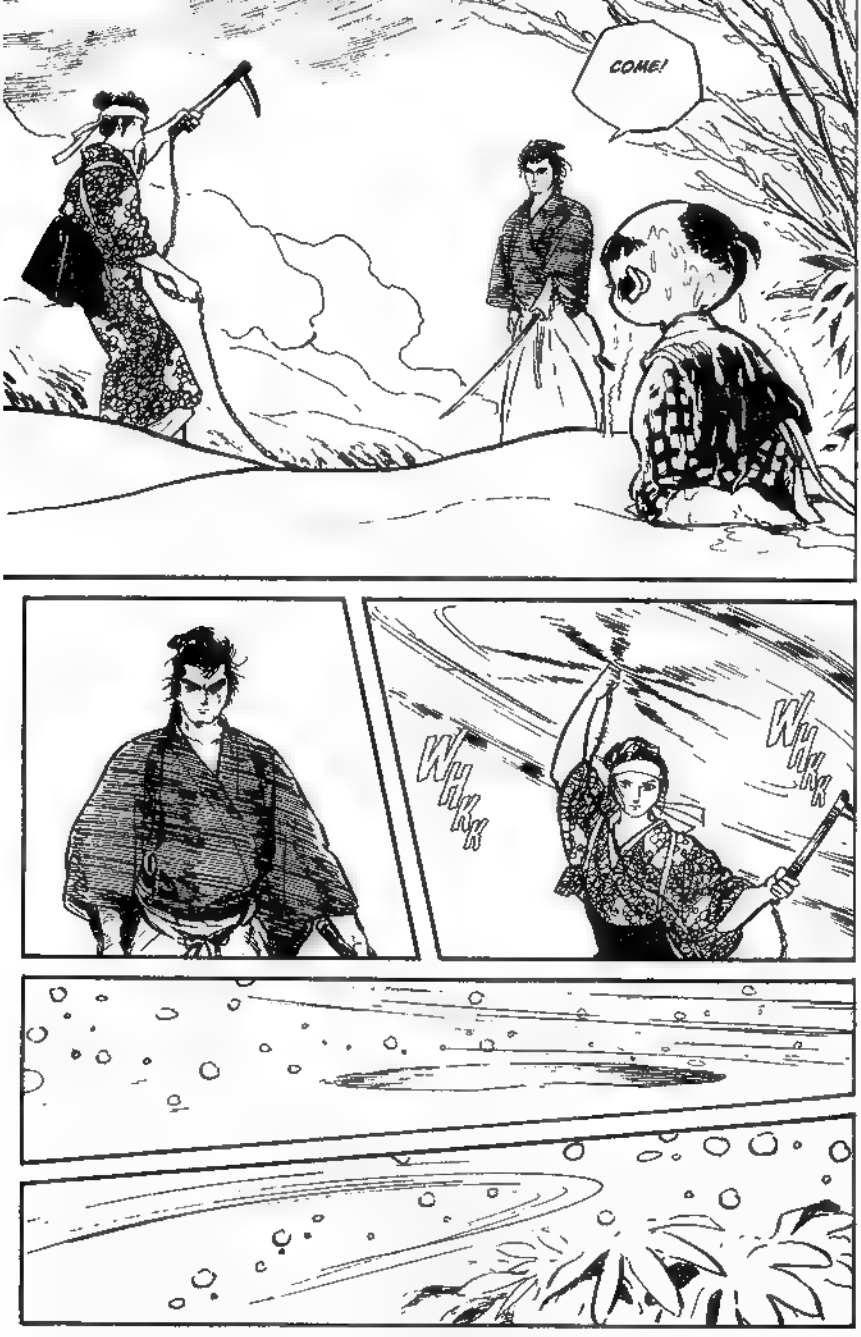
SHWSSH
CHNK
WHNK
WHNK
WHNK
FWHTTT

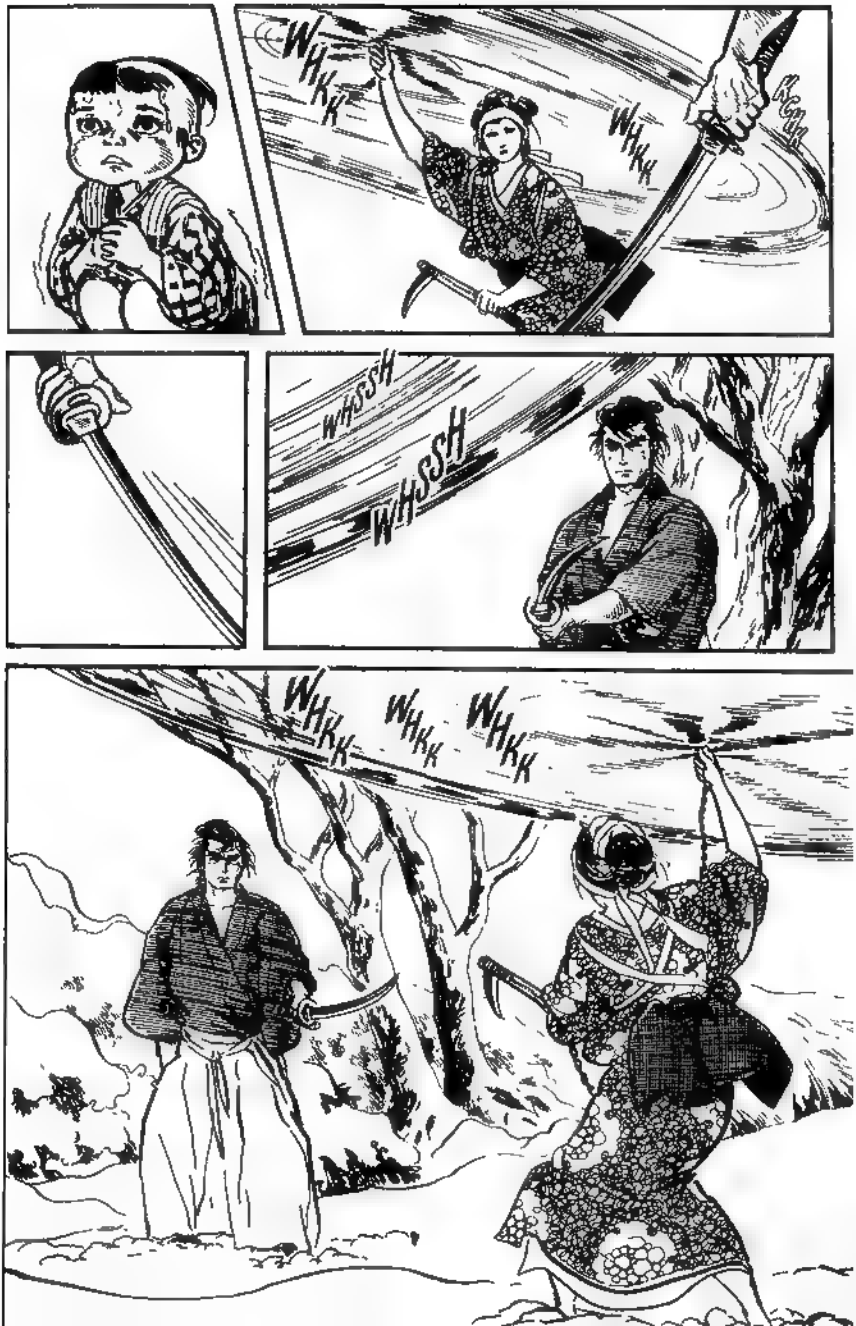
SLSSH
SPLSSH
NO!! DON'T LET GO -GRAB IT!
QUICKLY!

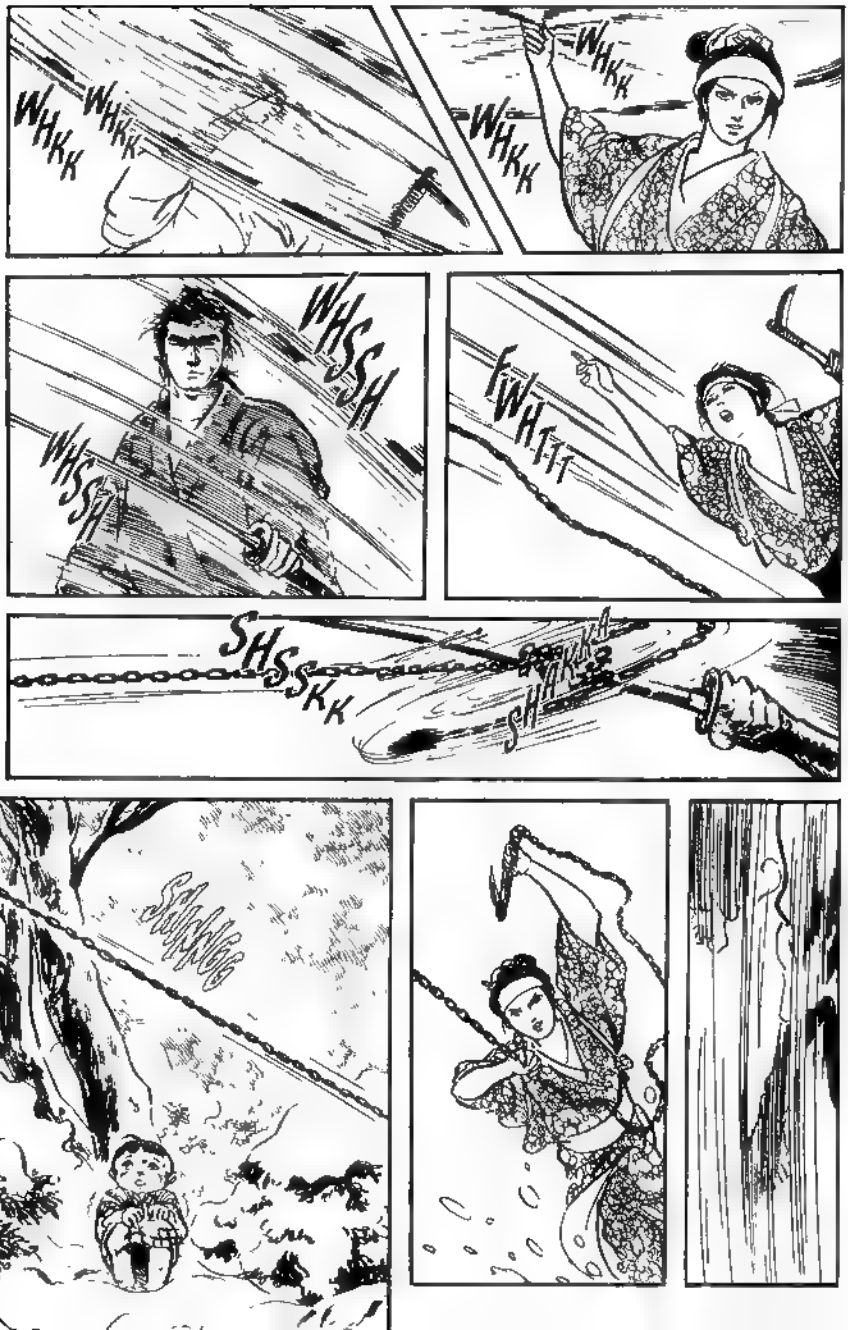
SPLSSH
PLSSH
SPRISH
W-WHY?!
WHY WON'T HE GRAB THE CHAIN..?!

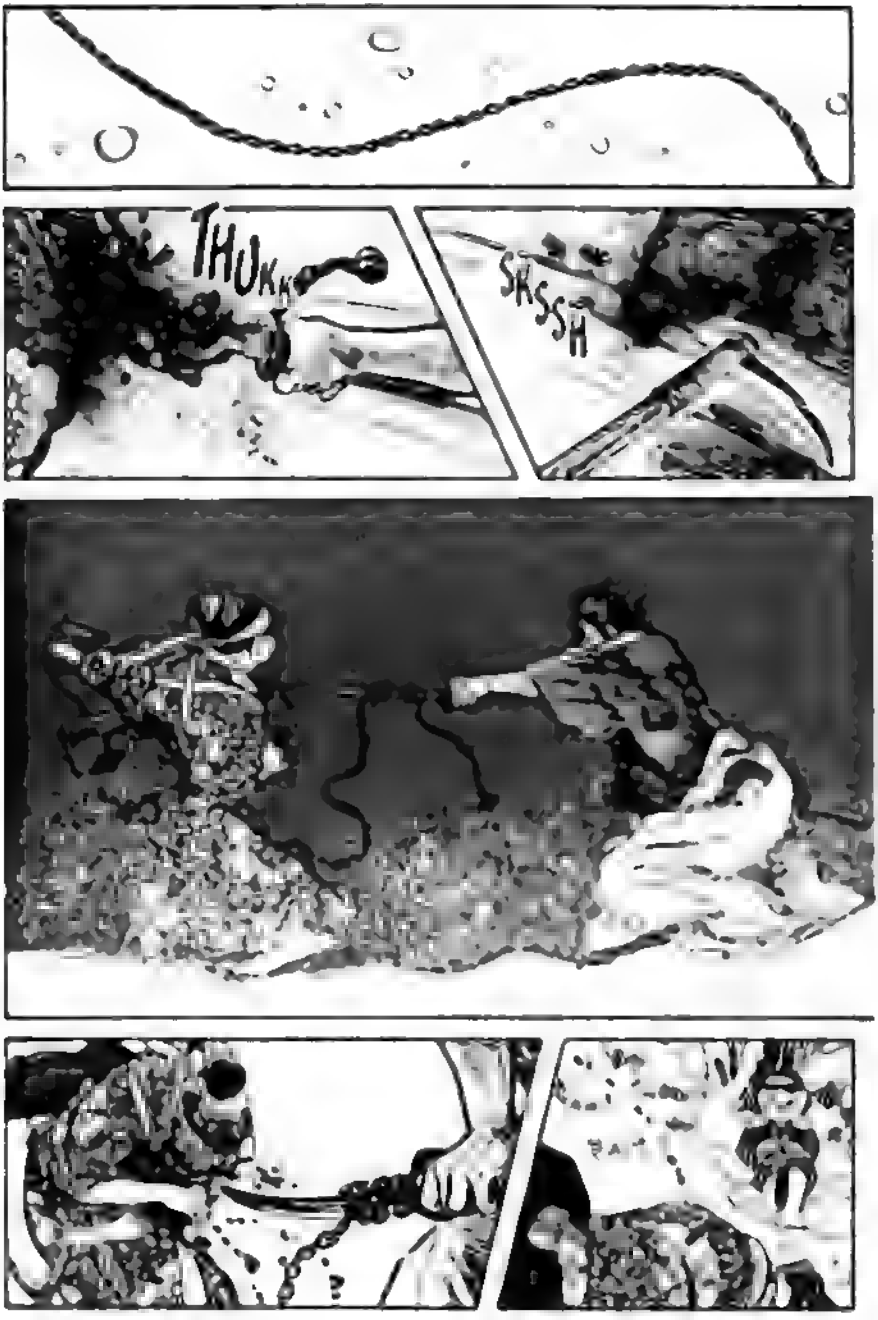

IF HIS FATHER FOUGHT .
..THEN SO MUST HE.
THIS THE BOY KNEW.
EVEN IF THAT ENEMY EXTENDED A HAND OF SUCCOR...
HIS FATHER WAS HIS ALL.
IF FATHER WOULD NOT HELP

THEN THERE WERE *REASONS* HE WOULD NOT
TO LIVE. OR TO DIE.
WAKRUSH
IT WAS UP TO HIM ALONE-
-THIS THE BOY KNEW.
A CHILD OF DESTINY LIVING IN THE WHIRLPOOL OF BATTLE.
W-WHY ..?


COME!
WHHK
WHHK


WHKK
WHKH
KGNK
WHSSH
WHSSH
WHKK
WHKK
WHKK


WHKK
WHKK
WHKK
WHKK
WHSSH
WHSSH
WHTTT
SHSSKK
SHAKKA
SHAKKA
SWINGG


THUKK
SKSSSH

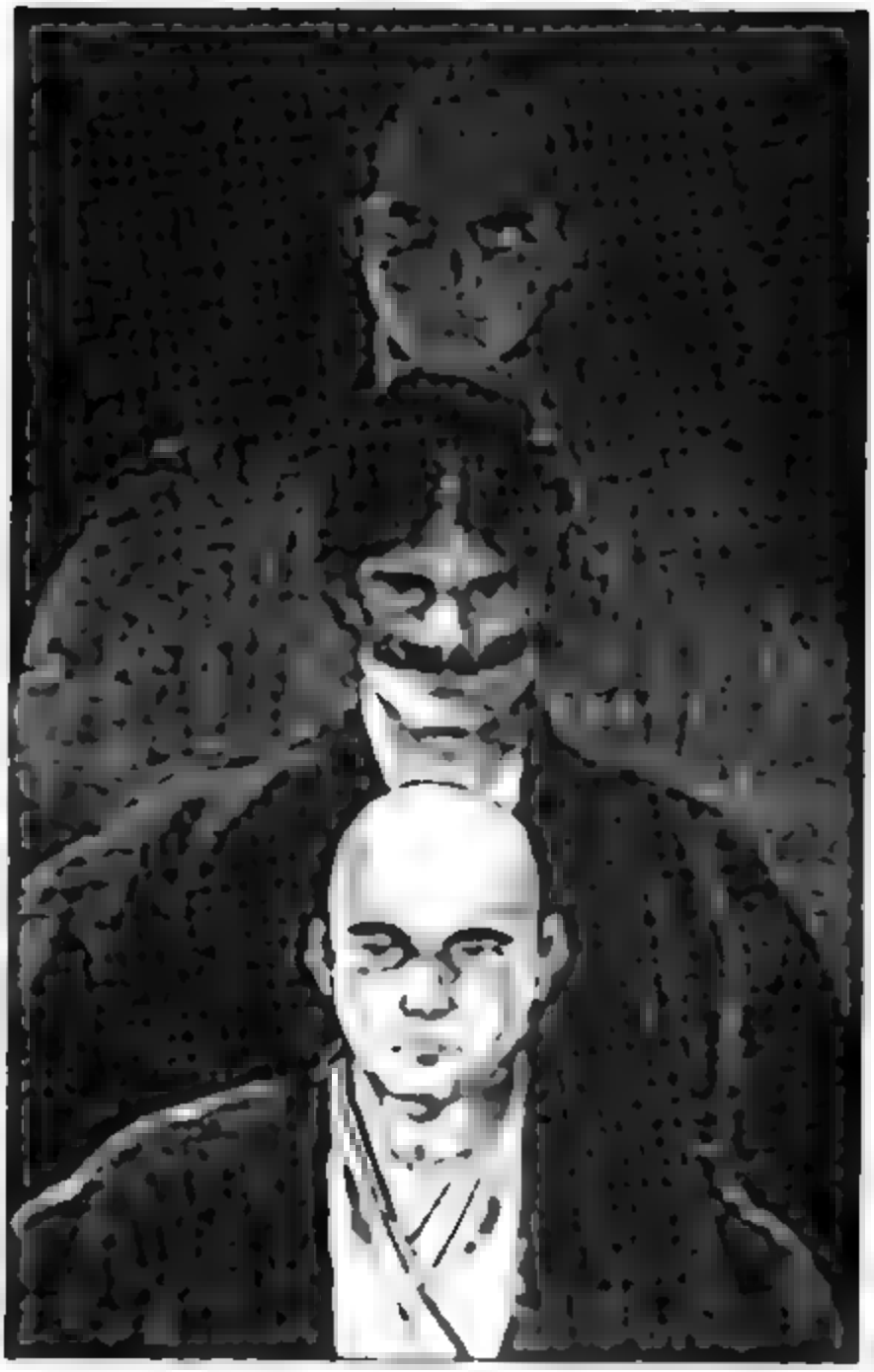
MY . LOVE.
AT LAST . I JOIN YOU!
AT... LAST...
CLANK
THIS WOMAN THOUGHT HER DREAM WAS T'STRIKE A BLOW AGAINST HER ENEMY BEFORE SHE DIED. YET WHAT SHE TRULY WANTED WAS T'BE WITH HER HUSBAND EVERY DAY ALONE WAS AGONY
NOW ALL HER WISHES ARE FULFILLED HOW HAPPY SHE MUST BE !
. . . . . .
NOT ALL THE JOYS OF OUR FLEETIN' WORLD ARE FOUND IN LIFE. TO BE ABLE T'DIE, T'FIND HAPPINESS IN THE WORLD TO COME . THAT, TOO .
NAMU. . . . .

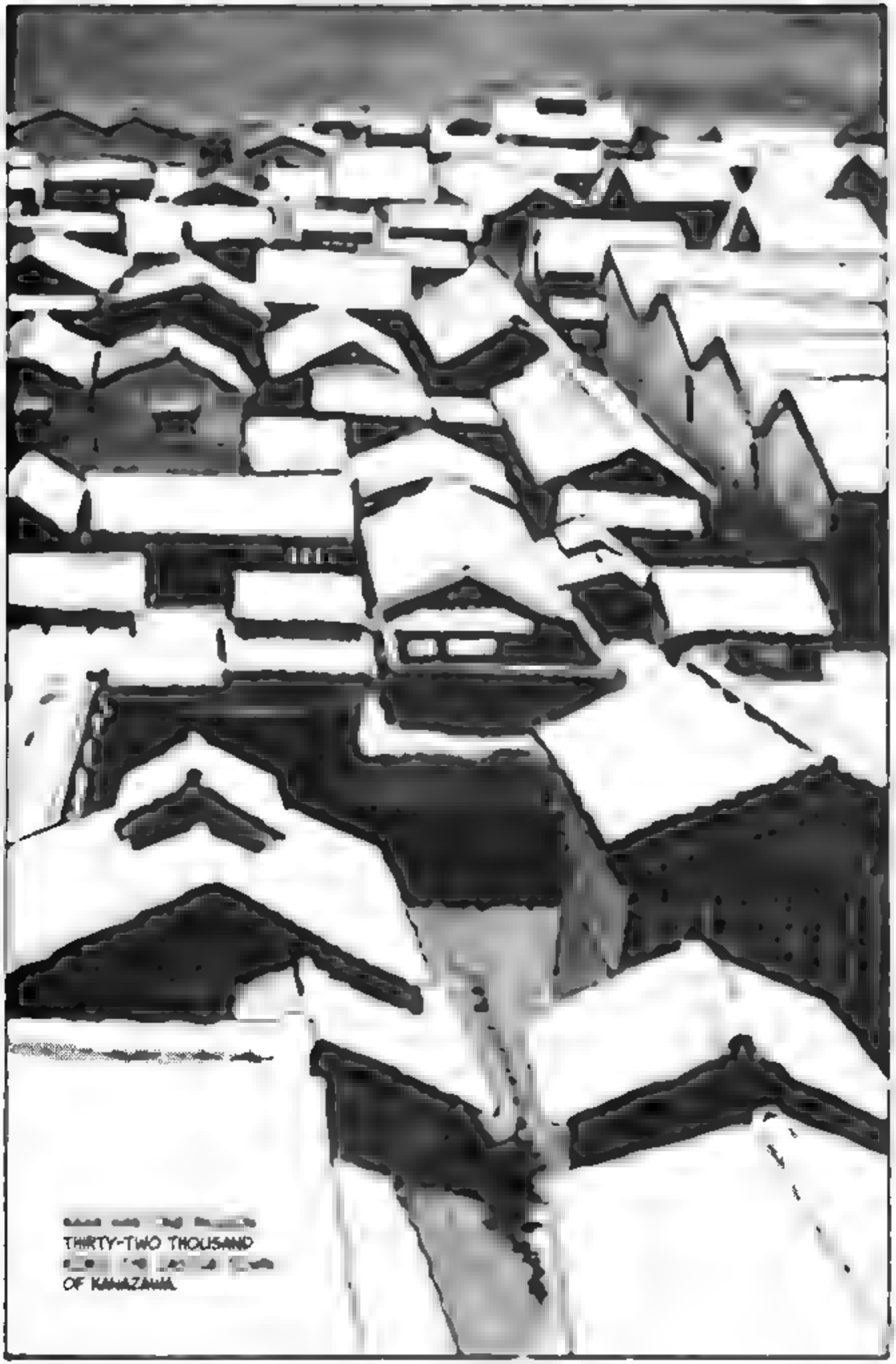
YOU LET HER CUT YOU.. DIDN'T YOU?
....
....

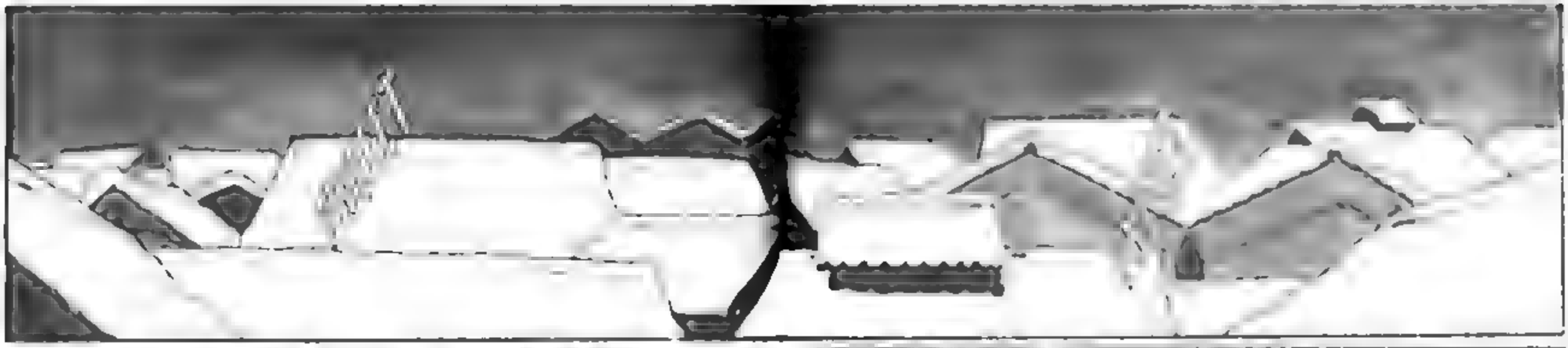
"THE TEARS OF MY QUEST, WHOLE CLOTH AT LAST".

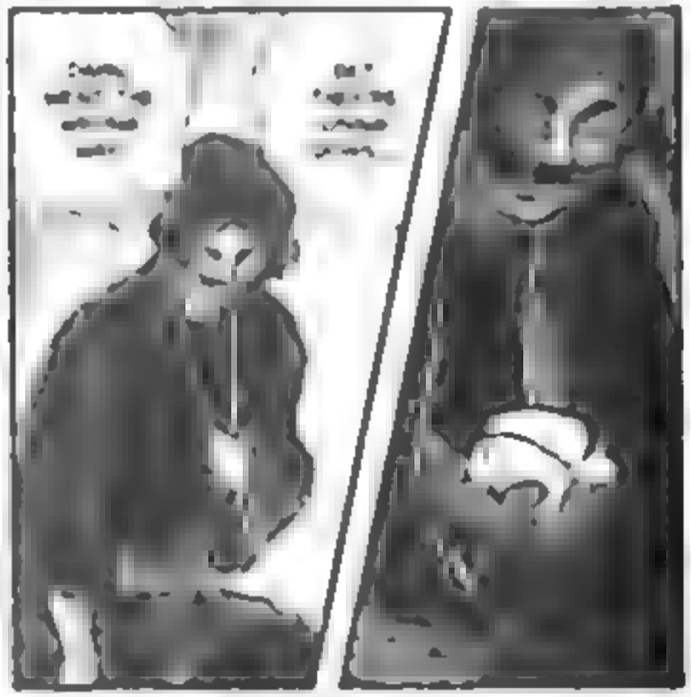
the forty-fourth

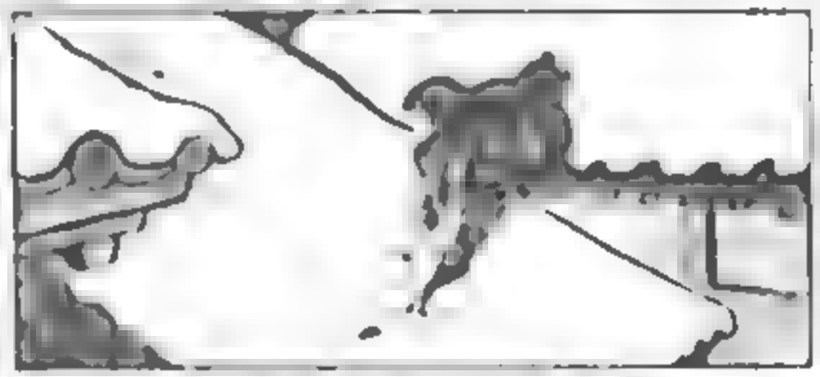
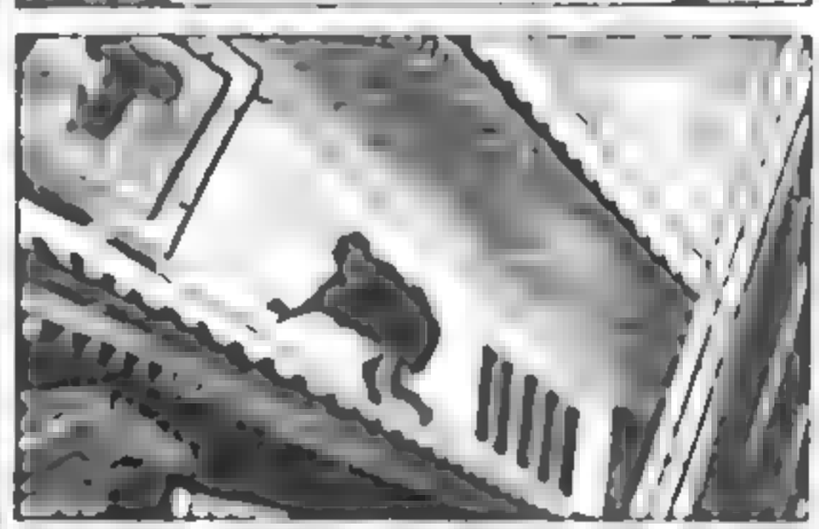
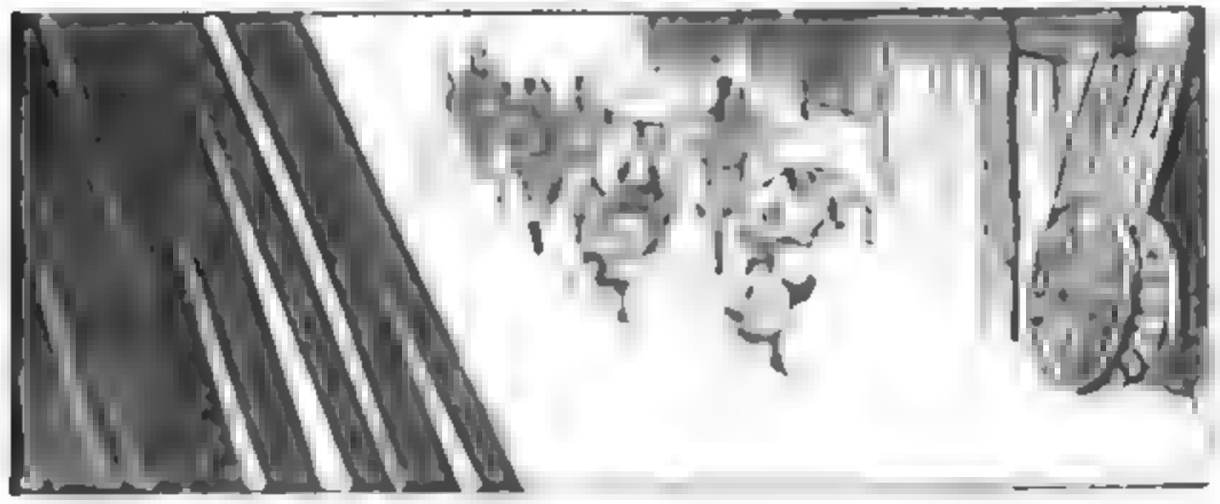
Beku-no-li




THIRTY-TWO THOUSAND
OF KAWAZAWA





Ahh
Sorry
DON'T
LET ME GET
AWAY

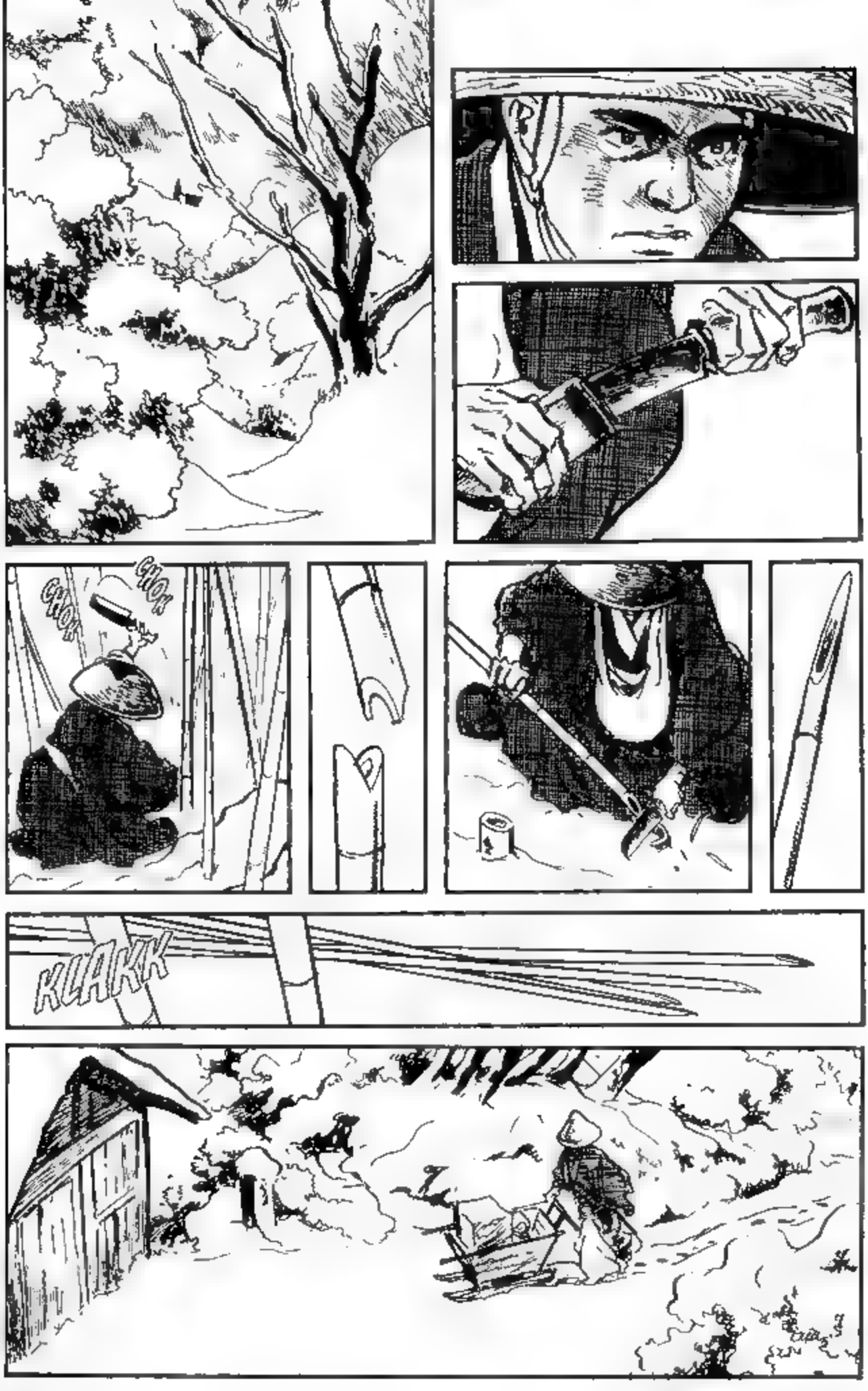
大聖寺那谷山所
*DAISE-JI TEMPLE
NAYA MOUNTAIN PASS

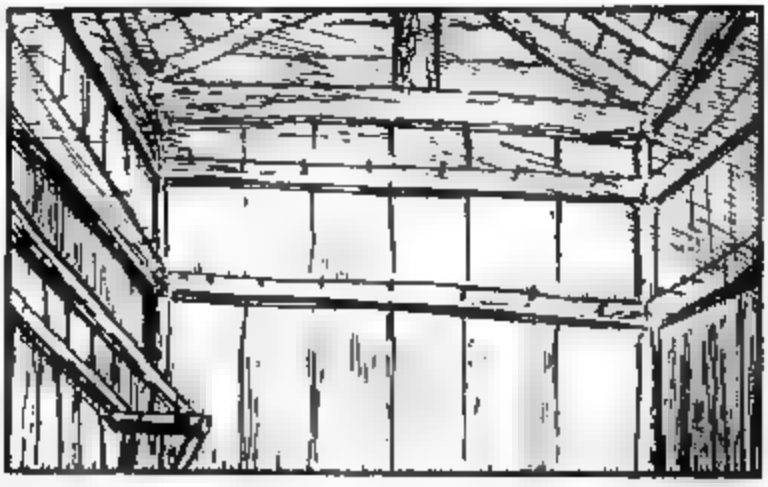
大聖山屋
*SNOWSHOE
STORAGE

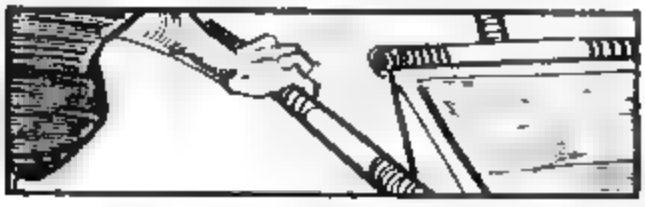
SPRAK

ALMOST TIME.

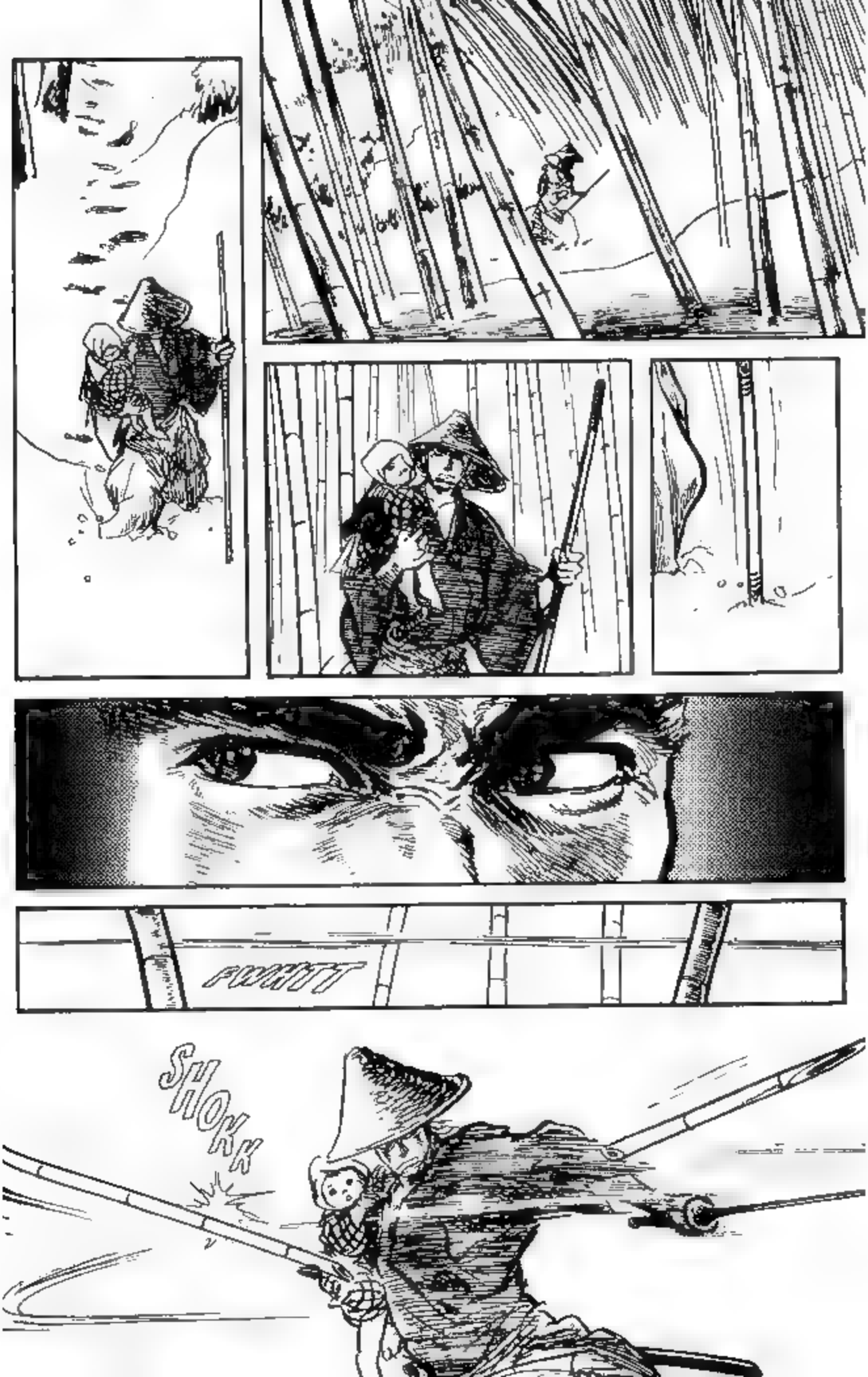
THERE!


GNOK
GNOK
KLAKK

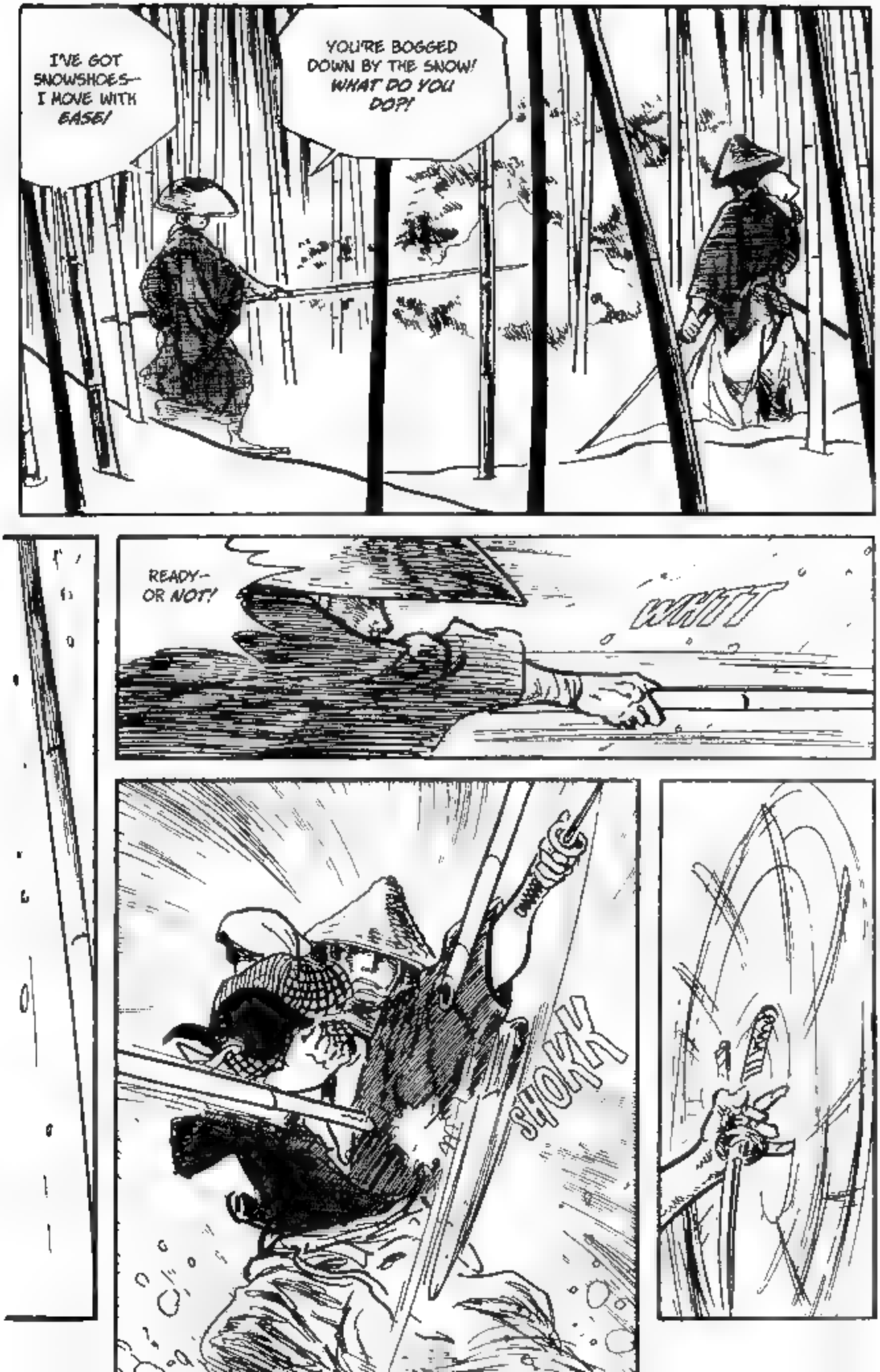




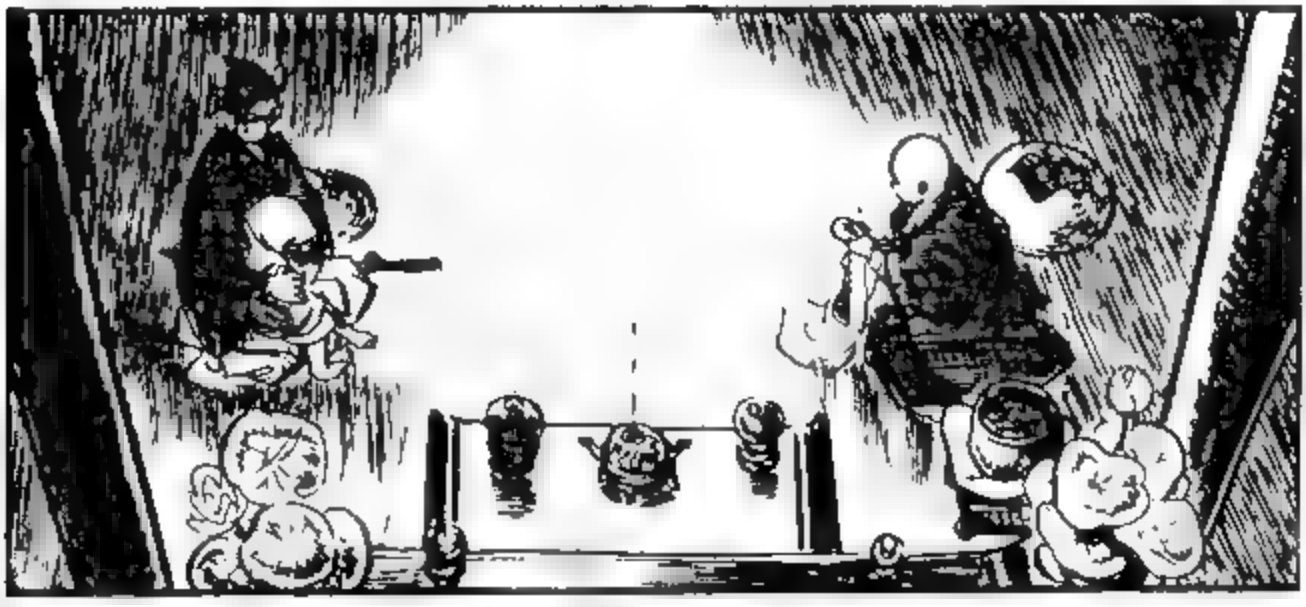
KCHAK


FWIIT
SHOKK

FWUTT
WHSH
WHT
CHOK
CHOK
WHTT
SO FAR ANY GOOD SWORDSMAN COULD DO IT!
NOW FOR THE REAL STUFF!
GKK


I'VE GOT SNOWSHOES— I MOVE WITH EASE!
YOU'RE BOGGED DOWN BY THE SNOW! WHAT DO YOU DO?!
READY— OR NOT!
WHIT
SHOK

WOO
WHOA!
SWING
AAH!?!
ASSASSINATIONS. FIVE HUNDRED RYÖ!
L-LONE WOLF AND CUB! OKAY, I'M CONVINCED!
ONE REQUIREMENT ONLY—TELL ME EVERYTHING!
G-GOTCHA.



SHSSS
ONE.. TWO. THREE..
FIVE.. SIX. SEVEN.
EIGHT...
THERE! FIVE HUNDRED! SEE?!
AS YOU SAY
NOW. I'M A THIEF! BEKU-NO-JI!
....
....
IT'S A TOPSY-TURVY NAME, BUT IT FITS! I STEAL FROM YOU GOOD FOLK, AND THAT'S REAL BAD. BUT I TAKE MY CASH AND HELP OUT POOR FOLK WHAT CAN'T GET BY—SO THAT'S PRETTY GOOD!
I'M NO SAINT, NOT ME, BUT SINCE MY JOB'S SO LOW, I LIKE TO AIM HIGH! TOPSY-TURVY, SEE? THAT'S WHAT MY NAME MEANS, 'CUZ THAT'S WHAT I AM.

. . . .
. . . .
YEP .RIP 'EM OFF .GET CHASED.. CUT AND RUN! I'VE BEEN ALL OVER THE COUNTRY! BUT IT STILL TOOK ME SIX MONTHS TO TRACK YOU DOWN AFTER I HEARD THE RUMORS.
I FINALLY SPOTTED YOU ON THE *HOKURIKURO* ROAD, AND WHEN YOU HEADED FOR KAGA, I NIPPED ON AHEAD AND WAITED
BESIDES WHICH .I'VE GOT A *SCORE* TO SETTLE IN KAGA.
I GREW UP NEAR THE KURIKARA PASS, BETWEEN KAGA AND ETCHŪ.
I'LL NEVER FORGET THAT DAY. IT WAS SUMMER I WAS SEVENTEEN.
KASHŪ-KŌ WAS HEADED FROM KAGA TO EDO ON *SANKIN KŌTAI*. THROUGH THE PASS .

"WHEN KASHU-KŌ'S ON *SANKIN KŌTAI*, HE'S GOT FOUR GUYS GUARDING HIS PALANQUIN—THE *OJIGIYAKU*
"THEY GOTTA HANDLE ANYTHING, AND I MEAN *ANY-THING* THAT HAPPENS... SO THEY PICK THE TOUGHEST GUYS IN THE *HAN*"
Ohhh Ohhh Ohhh

DRNN
DRNNN
DRNNN
DRNN

WAHH!!
OXEN?!
A STAM-PEDE!
FALL BACK!
FALL BACK!
OUT OF THE WAY, FOOLS!!

RMBB
RMBB
"THE OJIGIYAKU WERE LIKE DEMONS FROM HELL. JUST INCREDIBLE!"

SSHH
KK

"THE AOKI FAMILY, FATHER AND SON, AND THE AKAI BROTHERS! THEY'RE CALLED THE BLUE AND RED DEMONS OF KAGA. AND THEY WERE AS GOOD AS THEIR NAME THAT DAY."

*MY FAMILY AND I SAW IT ALL, FROM THE CLIFF ABOVE
*AND NO, I DON'T KNOW WHERE THOSE OXEN CAME FROM—THEY CHARGED OUT OF NOWHERE
IT WAS ALL OVER IN MINUTES
HRM?!
THERE!!

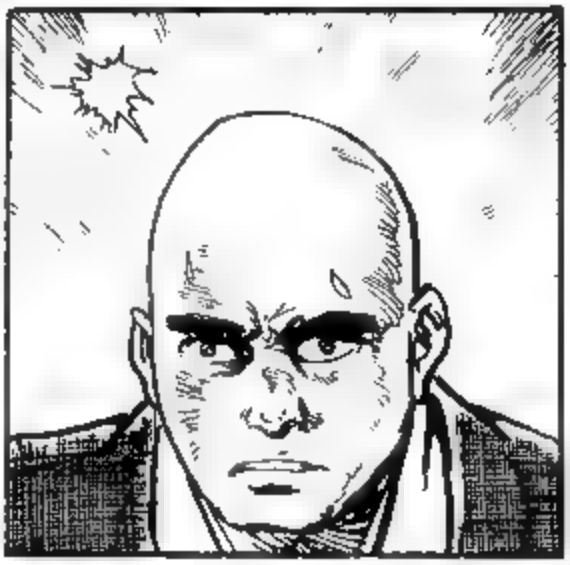
YOU SCUM !!
NO!
HALT!
RYAHH!
IT WEREN'T US!
WE DON'T EVEN OWN NO OXEN! P-PLEASE..!

AAUUGH!!
DA! MA!
NO!
AHHHH!
BEK!
S-SIS!
SOMEHOW I SURVIVED THE FALL, BUT MY FAMILY .

THE INVESTIGATION LATER FOUND OUT IT WAS O-NIWABAN FROM EDO THAT DID IT, OUT TO KILL KASHŪ-KŌ
SO THAT'S SETTLED BUT MY HEART ISN'T! WHY'D THEY HAVE TO KILL THEM?! NO QUESTIONS! NOTHING!
KASHŪ-KŌ ENTERS KAGA FROM EDO THIS EVENING AND THE OJIGIYAKU ARE WITH HIM!
I WANT THEM TO PAY IN THE PASS FOR WHAT THEY DID IN THE PASS! THAT'S MY DREAM! SO— WILL YOU DO IT?!
VERY CLEVER, "BEKU-NO-JI" !
EH ?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

NOT PEASANT..
NOT MERCHANT..
NOT EVEN A THIEF!
FOR NO COMMONER
SAYS "KŌ" !

TO USE
KŌ FOR
DAIMYŌ, THE
LEADERS OF
THE LAND.



ONLY SAMURAI
FROM ANOTHER HAN
WOULD SAY "KASHU-KŌ".
OR A SERVANT OF
THE SHŌGUN!

BEKU-NO-JI!!
YOU ARE KUSA!
ADMIT IT!

FWHT

WH-WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?! CHECK OUT THE GOLD, WHY DON'T YOU?!
THE SEAL OF KAGA!
YOU KNOW THEY USE HANSATSU IN KAGA! THE GOLD'S ALL STAMPED AND STORED AWAY IN THE CASTLE VAULTS AND THE MONEY-CHANGING HOUSES!
IF I WAS KUSA, WHY WOULD I STEAL? ONE MESSAGE TO EDO, AND MY BUDDIES WOULD BRING ME ALL THE EDO GOLD I WANTED!
SEE?! I STOLE IT ALL IN KAGA, 'CAUSE I'M A THIEF!
WHY WOULD I USE THE WORD "KUSA"...
..IF I DID NOT KNOW WHAT IT MEANT? GRASS! YOU TAKE ROOT IN A HAN LIKE WILD GRASS, BUILDING A LIFE, MARRYING, HAVING CHILDREN! AND WHEN YOU DIE, YOU PASS YOUR DUTY ON TO YOUR CHILDREN, EVEN YOUR GRAND-CHILDREN!
EACH BLADE WAITING A LIFETIME FOR A SINGLE ORDER!

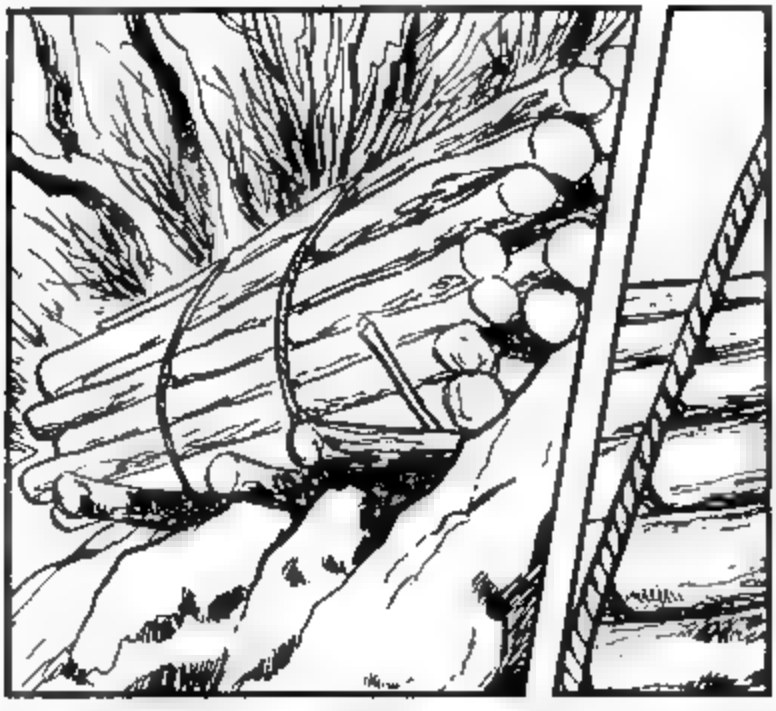
KUSA— THE SATO-IRI SHINOBI OF THE KURO-KUWA!
HOW COULD A SIMPLE THIEF KNOW THAT?!
PROBABLY THIS IS YOUR FIRST MISSION AS A SATO-IRI SHINOBI, BUT .
...THERE ARE ONLY TWO THINGS I CARE TO KNOW!

WAS YOUR FAMILY *REALLY* SLAUGHTERED IN THE PASS. ?
YES! YES, THEY *WERE!*
MY *MOM!* MY *DAD!* MY POOR *SISTER!*
AND THE RUNNING OF THE *OXEN*. . ?
I FOUND OUT LATER THAT IT WAS A BRANCH OF KASHŪ-*KŌ*'S OWN CLAN, THE *DAISEIJI* FACTION. THEY WANTED TO TAKE OVER THE *HAN*—WE JUST GOT IN THE *WAY!*

FIVE HUNDRED RYŌ FOR AN ASSASSINATION. ACCEPTED!
EVEN KNOWING I'M A KUROKUWA SATO-IRI SHINOBI?!
W-WHY?!
YOU SPEAK THE TRUTH. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EASY TO GET GOLD FROM YOUR KUROKUWA BOSSES, BUT YOU RISKED YOUR LIFE TO STEAL IT
....
....
BECAUSE IT WAS FOR YOUR OWN VENDETTA-- BETWEEN YOU AND THE OJIGIYAKU
....
....
WAIT!

MY ORDERS WERE TO *KILL* YOU WHEN YOU ENTERED KAGA!
OF COURSE I KNEW I COULDN'T BEAT YOU! SO I PLOTTED TO PIT YOU AGAINST THE RED AND BLUE DEMONS!
I FIGURED NOT EVEN A FORMER *KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN* COULD STOP THEM *ALL!*
IT'D BE HARD ENOUGH *ONE-ON-ONE!*
BUT YOU'LL STILL *DO* IT?! KNOWING *EVERYTHING* ...?!
WE LIVE IN *MEIFUMADŌ!* WE ACCEPT THE TRIALS OF THE SIX PATHS, THE FOUR LIVES!

BUT. BUT NOW YOU KNOW IT'S A KUROKUWA TRAP!
YOUR TEARS.
YOU SHED THEM FOR YOUR MURDERED FAMILY
THE KUROKUWA NEVER WEEP



IT'S DONE ?!
YES
GOOD!
WE JUST NEED TO LURE HIM THIS FAR.
INDEED
IF THE OJIGIYAKU KILL HIM, WE WON'T NEED THE LOGS.
BUT IF WE DO? THEN, KASHŪ-KŌ..?
HE DIES MOST UNFORTU-NATE.
BUT RETSUDŌ-SAMA ORDERED US TO KILL ŌGAMI ITTŌ— AT ANY PRICE!

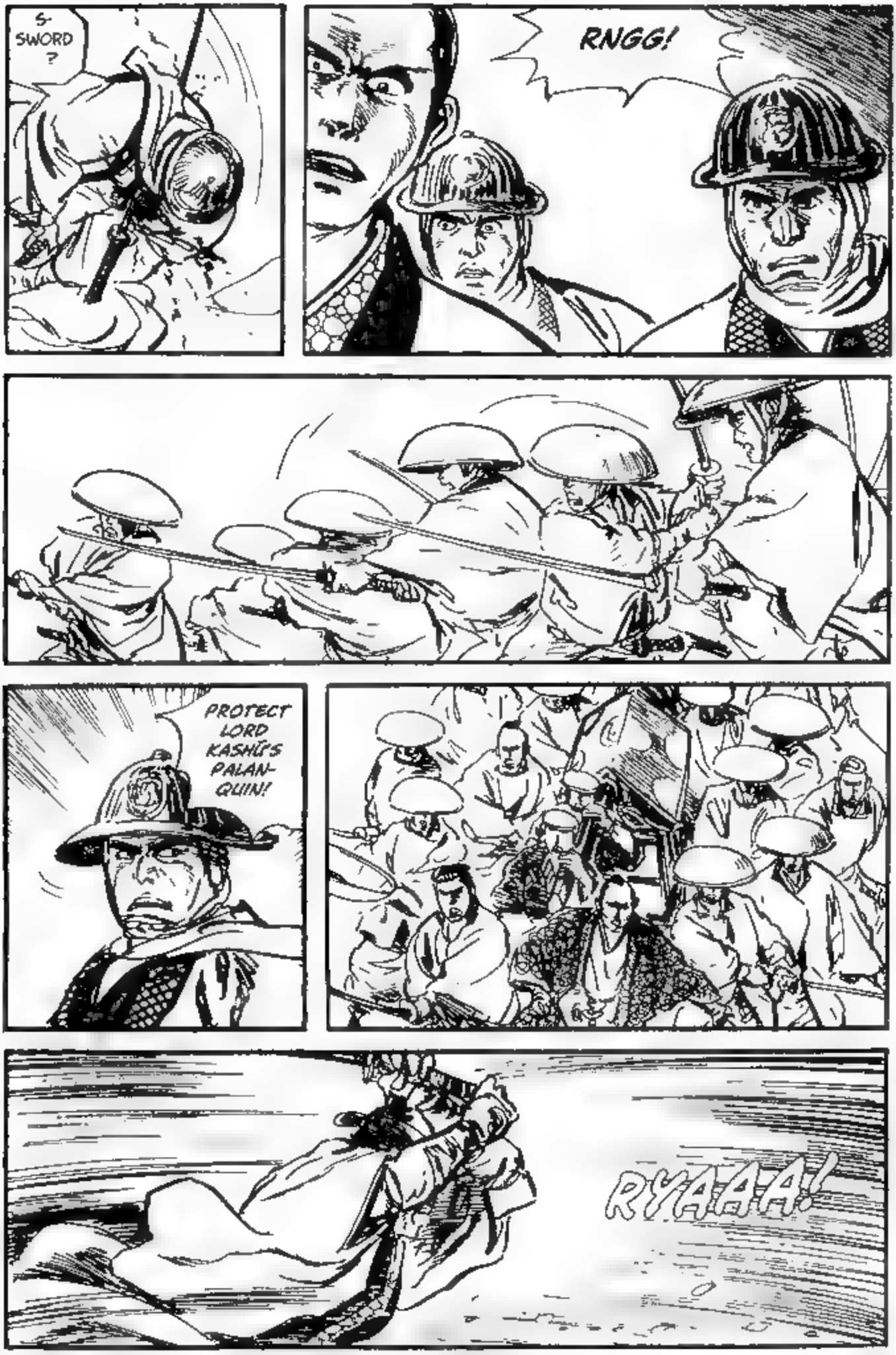
THEY COME!

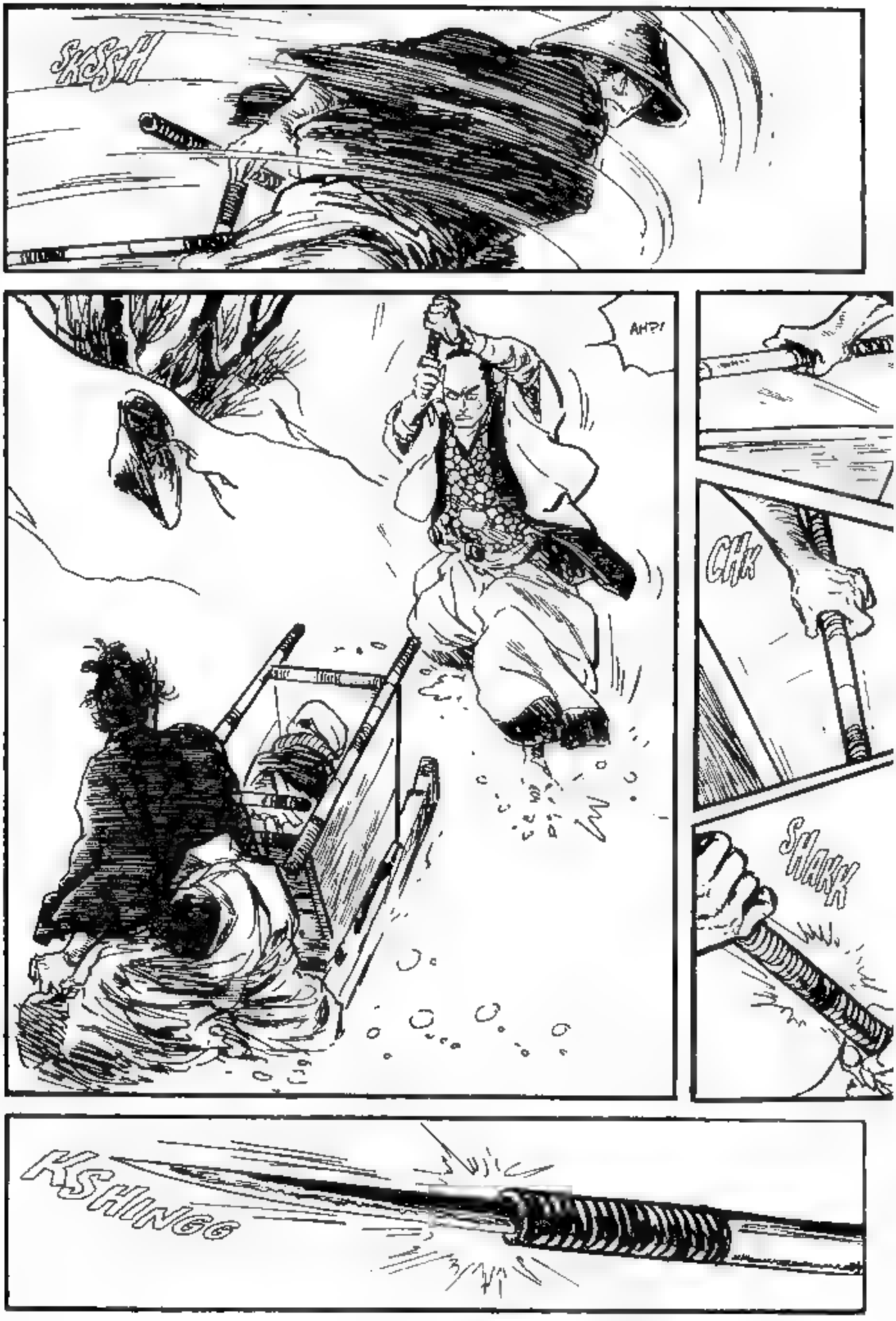
WHO'S THAT?!
WHA--?! AN OUT-RAGE!

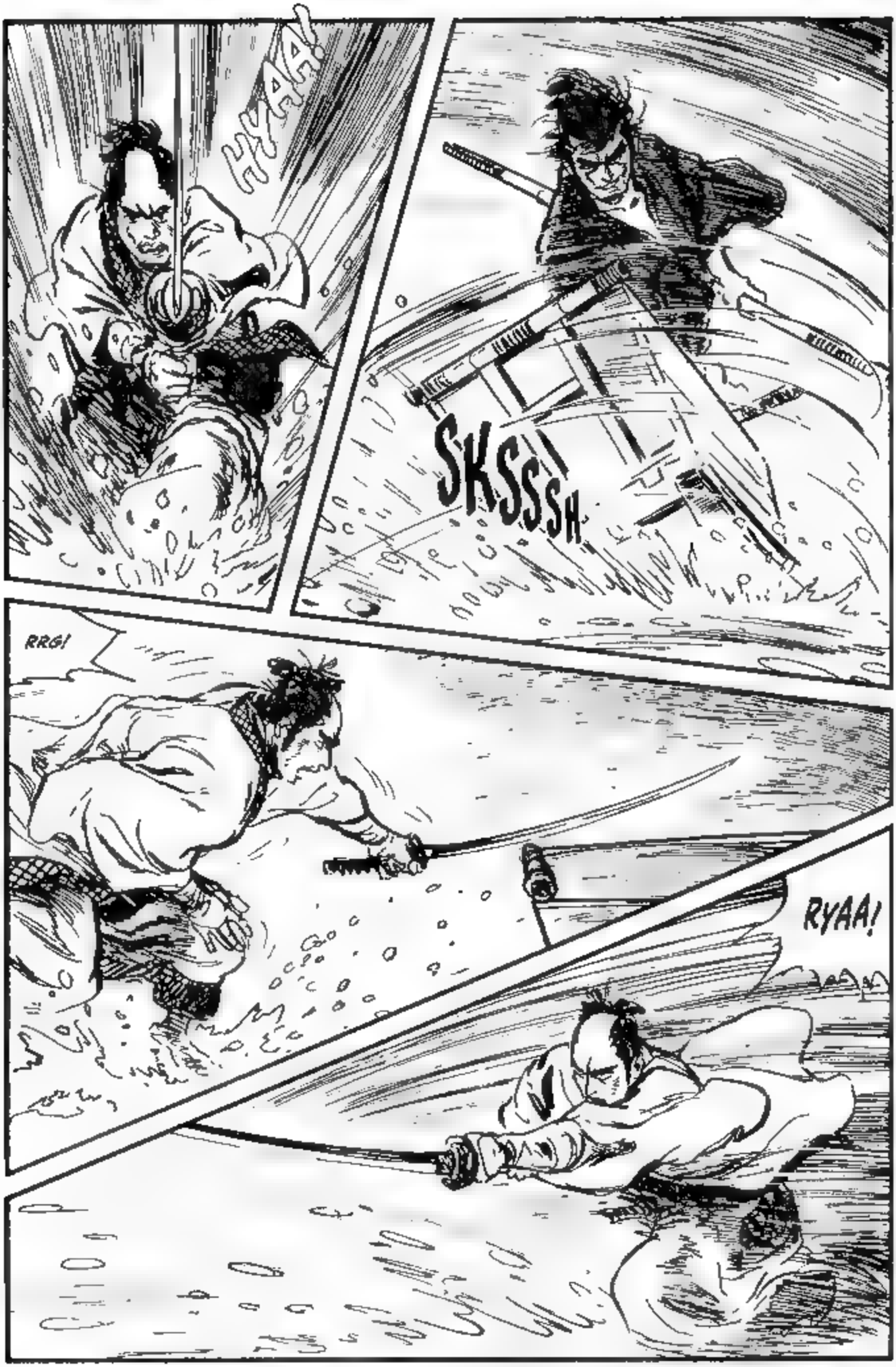
RNGG!
WHO ARE YOU?!
HOW DARE YOU OBSTRUCT THE PATH OF OUR LORD KASHŪ!
I HAVE NO GRUDGE WITH KASHŪ-KO!
I SEEK A DUEL WITH THE FOUR OJIGIYAKU!
HRN!

THEN, YOUR NAME!
ASSAS-SIN.
LONE WOLF AND CUB!

WHISH
CHOK
GKK!
THROW-
ING
YOUR


S-SWORD ?
RNGG!
PROTECT LORD KASHŪ'S PALAN-QUIN!
RYAAAA!

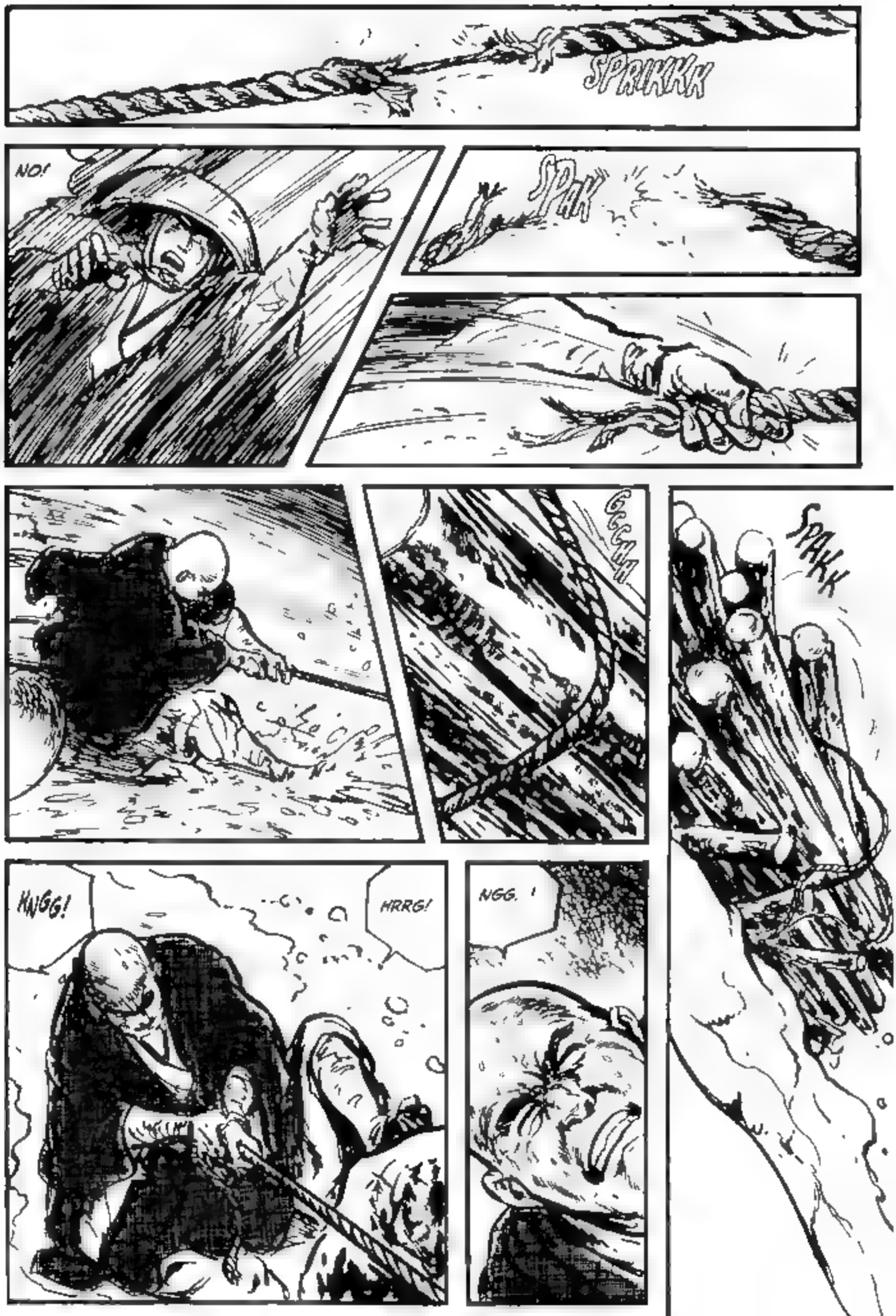

KSSH
AHP!
CHK
SHAKK
KSHINGG


EYAA!
SKSSSH
RRG!
RYAA!

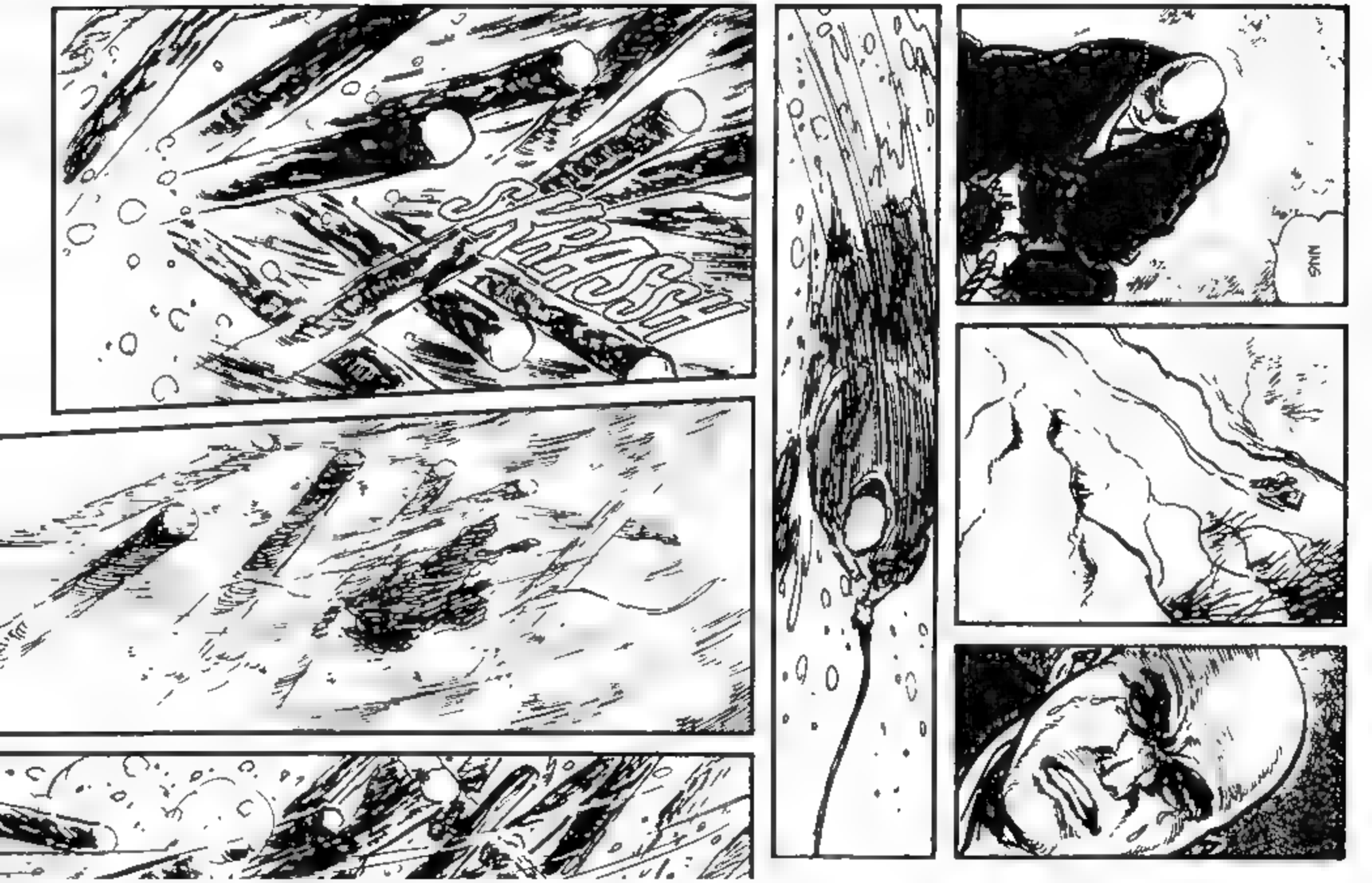
SKSSSH
D-DAMN!

NOW I SEE IT!
HE'S USING THE CART TO KEEP THEM AT BAY!
THEY CAN'T CLOSE! WITH HIS NAGAMAKI ITTŌ CONTROLS THE KILLING ZONE!

ENOUGH!
KASHŪ-KŌ WILL HAVE TO DIE!
GHOK
AGH!
WHY YOU-!!
SLICH
AUGGH!
CHOK
YOU MISERABLE SATO-IRI...!
YOU BETRAY THE KURO-KUWA ?
DOK


SPRIKKK
NO!
SPAK
GGGH
SPAKK
KNGG!
HRRG!
NGG. !

PLEASE PARDON MY OFFENSE.
!! AFTER HIM!!


SPLASH
NNG

LONE WOLF AND CUB BOOK EIGHT: THE END
TO BE CONTINUED

GLOSSARY

adauchi shamenjō
A pardon. *Adauchi* (revenge killings) were permitted by the government for family members. When a petition of *adauchi* was approved, the supplicants received an official pardon to prove they acted legally.

bakkaku
The government. The shōgun, his councilors, and his senior officials.

bōzu
A Buddhist monk.

daikan
The primary local representative of the shōgunate in territories outside of the capital of Edo. The *daikan* and his staff collected taxes owed to Edo and oversaw public works, agriculture, and other projects administered by the central government.

dōtanuki
A battle sword. Literally, "sword that cuts through torsos."

Edo
The capital of medieval Japan and the seat of the shōgunate. The site of modern-day Tokyo.

fudai
The inner circle of clans pledging allegiance to the Tokugawa. The *fudai* clans were Tokugawa allies even before the decisive battle of Sekigahara that assured Tokugawa dominance for the next two hundred years.

haiku
Traditional short verse, with a 5-7-5 syllable pattern.

han
A feudal domain.

hannyatō
"Wisdom's water." A euphemism among Buddhist monks for *sake*.

hansatsu
Paper currency, issued by individual *han* and used only within their borders.

hanshi
Samurai in the service of a *han*.

hikyaku
Runners. An Edo version of the Pony Express, delivery of mail and money by horse and by foot.

Hokurikuro
The main route into northern Japan.

honjin
The lodgings for *daimyō* and senior shōgunate officials.

honorifics
Japan is a class and status society, and proper forms of address are critical. Common markers of respect are the prefixes *o* and *go*, and a wide range of suffixes. Some of the suffixes you will encounter in *Lone Wolf and Cub*:
chan – for children, young women, and close friends
dono – archaic; used for higher-ranked or highly respected figures
sama – used for superiors
san – the most common, used among equals or near-equals
sensei – used for teachers, masters, respected entertainers, and politicians

kansho
A petition admonishing a superior, always fraught with personal risk in feudal Japan. The *kansho* in Chapter 39 is a *jiji-kansho*, addressed directly to the shōgun himself.

kenkyaku
Swordsman, *kenshi*.

kō
A *daimyō* (feudal lord).

kōgi kaishakunin
The shōgun's own second, who performed executions ordered by the shōgun.

koku
A bale of rice. The traditional measure of a *han*'s wealth, a measure of its agricultural land and productivity.

kubi
A severed head. The *kubi* had great significance, be it the head of a wanted criminal presented to claim a bounty; or the head of a samurai, proof in death of his resolute will.

meifumadō
The Buddhist Hell. The way of demons and damnation.

nagamaki
A two-handed weapon taller than a man, with a long, curved blade.

namu
From the Sanskrit *namas*: "take refuge in the Buddha." A common prayer for the dead.

o-niwaban
A ninja. Literally, "one in the garden." (See *shinobi*.)

rōjū
Senior councilors. The inner circle of councilors directly advising the shōgun. The *rōjū* were the ultimate advisory body to the Tokugawa shōgunate's national government.

ryō
A gold piece, worth 60 *monme* or 4 *kan*.

sankin kōtai

The Tokugawa required that all *daimyō* spend every other year in Edo, with family members remaining behind when they returned to their *han*. This practice increased Edo's control over the *daimyō*, both political and fiscal, since the cost of maintaining two separate households and traveling to and from the capital placed a huge strain on *han* finances.

sato-iri shinobi

Shinobi (ninja) based in *sato* (homelands) around Japan.

seppuku

The right to kill oneself with honor to atone for failure, or to follow one's master into death. Only the samurai class was allowed this glorious but excruciating death. The abdomen was cut horizontally, followed by an upward cut to spill out the intestines. When possible, a *kaishakunin* performed a beheading after the cut was made to shorten the agony.

shidō

Bushidō. The way of the warrior.

shinobi

A generic term for ninja, meaning "one who moves in secrecy." Ninja had their heyday in the time of warring states before the rise of the Tokugawa clan. Originally mercenaries serving different warlords, by the Edo period they were in the service of the central government. The most famous *shinobi* were the *ninja* of Iga and Kaga, north of Kyoto. The Kurokuwa that appear in *Lone Wolf and Cub* were officially the laborers and manual workers in Edo Castle. Whether they truly served as a secret spy corps is lost in history.

tenryō

Government land, administered directly by the shōgunate. Law was enforced by the *daikan* magistrate assigned from Edo. In *han* territory, the *han* authorities enforced the law.

toshiyori

Literally, elders. The top officials of the shōgunate and the *han*, encompassing the *rōjū* senior and *wakadoshiyori* junior councilors and *karō* elders.

wakadoshiyori

Junior councilors. The Tokugawa shōgunate was a hybrid government, both a national government empowered by the emperor to govern the nation as a whole, and a *daimyō* government like that of any *han*, concerned with protecting the interests of the Tokugawa clan itself. The council of *wakadoshiyori* junior councilors was the highest advisory body to the shōgun on matters affecting the clan, rather than the nation as a whole.